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Whatever Happened to Kony2012? Understanding a Global Internet Phenomenon as an Emergent Social Identity

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Abstract

Kony2012 was a viral Internet video that attracted unprecedented online interest in promoting a campaign to arrest the leader of an African militant group. The current research considers the social psychological bases of social media-based collective action. In three cross sectional surveys ($N = 304$) collected before, on, and after the key action date of April 20, 2012, we consider the nature (opinion-based or global) and function (emergent or transforming) of social identity in modern forms of social action. Multigroup structural equation modeling showed that Kony2012 action was best captured by an emergent opinion-based social identity. Moreover, the same factors that predicted Kony2012 action generally also predicted engagement in new repertoires of protest (involving the use of social media) and an observable traditional socio-political action (signing a letter to a government minister). The results suggest that there is no sharp dividing line between traditional and new forms of collective action and that both may be understood as valid expressions of collective selfhood.

Whatever Happened to Kony2012? Understanding a Global Internet Phenomenon as an Emergent Social Identity.

Perhaps digital media may foster a new kind of collective identity—a virtual one—that is in some ways *more* effectively mobilizing than the kind of collective identity forged in church basements and college dorm lounges by people holding hands and singing We Shall Overcome (Polletta, 2011).

On March 5, 2012 the US-based advocacy group Invisible Children released a 30 minute YouTube video calling for action against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The organization's aim was to make LRA leader Joseph Kony accountable by making him (in)famous and thus to raise international support for his arrest (www.Kony2012.com). Supporters of Kony2012 were asked to purchase campaign kits, contact decision makers and to cover walls throughout the world with posters on April 20, 2012 (termed 'Cover the Night'), in an effort to draw political attention to Kony's continued activities. Supporters were also urged to share the YouTube video. In that aspect the film was spectacularly successful, attracting approximately 100 million viewings. *Time* magazine ranked the film as the most viral video of all time (Time, 2012), and one poll suggested that more than 50% of young American adults had heard about Kony2012 in the days following the release of the film (Pew Research Center, 2012). However, not long after the film's popularity reached its zenith, the campaign's legitimacy was questioned (specifically, questions were raised about the appropriate use of funds) and the film's director attracted negative publicity through a public breakdown (see Curtis & McCarthy, 2012). Cover the Night attracted a low level of support (e. g., News, 2012) and critics of 'slacktivism' (or 'clicktivism') pointed to Kony2012 as another example of the failures of online activism (e.g. Bailyn, 2012, Mengestu, 2012; also Gladwell, 2010, for a discussion of the broader point).

The juxtaposition between Kony2012 and the Arab Spring protests is stark. The low levels of offline mobilization arising from Kony2012 stand in contrast to the rapid progression of the Arab Spring of late 2010 and 2011 where social media played a vital role in coordinating offline action (Howard et al., 2011; Lotan et al., 2011; McGarty, Thomas, Lala, Smith, & Bliuc, 2014). Indeed, McGarty et al. (2014) showed that online interaction set the scene for the massive displays of offline action that came to characterize those revolutions. In contrast, the much longer Kony2012 video was seen by many more people but generated very little action on the street. Are online mobilization and traditional socio-political action qualitatively different phenomena that need to be explained in different ways, or are they aspects of the same thing? One way of addressing this complex question is to ask whether those two forms of action share the same social psychological underpinnings.

In this paper we draw on the frameworks provided by two recent models of collective action to examine Kony2012: the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008), and the encapsulated model of social identity in collective action (EMSICA; Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009). Both models articulate a prominent role for social identity, reactions to injustice, and group efficacy beliefs (that is, the belief that coordinated action can be effective; Bandura, 2000), in motivating action for social change. A key question here is whether these frameworks adequately explain emergent global internet phenomena such as Kony2012, movements that are overwhelmingly characterized by what has been called 'the new repertoire of protest' (Polletta, 2011). Specifically, while some have questioned whether social identities are even necessary to understand modern (primarily online) social movements (e.g. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011), we follow Polletta (2011, above) and seek to advance an analysis of the *nature and function of social identity* in these global online social movements.

Social Identity, Injustice, and Efficacy in Kony2012

Social identities are understood to be central to coordinated, group-level social action (Reicher, 1984; see van Zomeren et al., 2009 for a meta-analysis; Thomas et al., 2009, for a review) but a key issue raised by movements such as Kony2012 is that there were no existing politicized collective identities (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) or manifest ingroup disadvantages amongst the citizens of wealthy nations (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012). Unlike many other social movements such as civil rights movements or the gay and lesbian rights movements, the participants do not themselves experience the structural disadvantage or repression (they are primarily relatively advantaged; see Leach, Snider & Iyer, 2002). How does one promote united collective action on behalf of people from other countries, where there is no common threat, incentive or pre-existing social identity (a problem considered by, for example, Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005; Thomas et al., 2009)? Here the literature suggests two alternatives.

The Kony2012 campaign entreated citizens around the world to help African children and thus it could be seen as an attempt to appeal to a superordinate global or human social identity. According to the tenets of self-categorization theory, people who identify with their global community should be motivated to support the campaign against Kony because doing so would advance the cause of humanity generally and fellow human beings in particular (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In a multinational study Buchan et al. (2011) showed that global identification was an independent predictor of global cooperation and global concerns. Specifically, Buchan et al. demonstrated that identification with the people of the world predicted behavioural contributions to a public goods dilemma, transcending parochial interests. In a separate line of research, McFarland, Webb and Brown (2012) highlight the role of identification with all of humanity in predicting knowledge of

(Study 8) and learning about (Study 9) global humanitarian concerns, and a willingness to contribute to international humanitarian relief (Study 10). Thus, research in the context of global cooperation (but not collective action specifically; Buchan et al., 2011) and global human rights (McFarland et al., 2012; McFarland, Brown & Webb, 2013) suggests that a global, superordinate identity may underpin Kony2012 action. Indeed, in the case of Kony2012, the imagery used in the campaign drew upon global identity with depictions of the problem as something to be addressed by united action with other people from all over the world (see Invisible Children, 2012; also Waldorf, 2013).

However, other literature suggests that the relationship between global identification and mobilization in online movements such as Kony2012 may not be straightforward. For example, Greenaway, Quinn and Louis (2011) showed that appeals to common humanity promoted forgiveness but *lowered* collective action intentions amongst victims of historical atrocities: If we are all fellow human beings why would we need to act against one another? Similarly, Morton and Postmes (2011) suggest that invoking a common humanity can serve as a moral defence for harmful intergroup activity; we are all 'only human'. Finally, Reese, Berthold and Steffens (2012) showed that members of wealthy countries project their own group attributes onto superordinate global categories, such that 'identification with the world' is much more akin to 'identification with advantaged people like me'. It is also the case that such global or superordinate identities are unlikely to be easily politicized (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). As politicized identities – those embedded in a context which recognizes a system of unequal power relations – are stronger predictors of collective action than are non-politicized identities (van Zomeren et al., 2008), it is also possible that global identification would be a weak predictor of action. Given these competing literatures and the absence of any empirical tests of global identification in the context of collective action, we consider the role of global identification in understanding Kony2012 action.

Another identity alternative is to create an anti-Kony opinion-based group. While traditional forms of collective action are often underpinned by the involvement of activist or social movement organizations (SMOs; see Stürmer & Simon, 2004), one of the notable features of (so-called) modern forms of protest is the absence of formal SMOs. Indeed, as Bennett and Segerberg (2012) point out, some of the waves of modern protest explicitly eschew the involvement of formal advocacy organizations because they are seen to be part of the problem (e.g., Spain's 'los indignados' M15). Opinion-based groups are defined only by shared values or opinions (Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007; McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, & Bongiorno, 2009). In this case the relevant opinion is that the campaign to oppose Kony must be supported. Theoretically, the difference between merely holding an opinion or attitude and identifying with an opinion-based group is that, in the latter case, people with the same opinion are perceived to be on the same team; that is, people experience the opinion as a meaningful basis for collective self-definition (social identification; Turner et al., 1987).

Recently, McGarty et al. (2014) have shown how the explosive growth of mass oppositional movements in North Africa can be understood as rapidly growing opinion-based groups organized around the expression of dissent through social (YouTube) and traditional media (satellite television). Elsewhere, Thomas, Mavor and McGarty (2012) showed that opinion-based groups predict support for humanitarian collective action on global poverty amongst members of advantaged groups. Opinion-based groups are not inherently politicized but Bliuc, McGarty, Hartley and Muntele Hendres (2012) have shown how such groups can become aligned with nationalist rhetoric and, in doing so, politicize. As such, opinion-based groups can form potent bases for challenges to authority based on solidarity between advantaged group members and disadvantaged group members (McGarty et al., 2009; cf. Subašić, Reynolds & Turner, 2008) or ally-activism (Russell, 2011). Arguably, the Kony2012 video strongly emphasizes the opinion-based nature of the collective identity. The opening

and closing sequences [respectively] state that "There is nothing so powerful as an *idea* whose time [has come]/ [is now]" (emphasis added). The non-partisan nature of the movement was represented by the slogan: "One thing we can all agree on". The current research thus considers the role of these two identity alternatives (global and opinion-based social identities) in capturing the global phenomenon of Kony2012.

Contemporary research on collective action also emphasizes the importance of perceptions of injustice (in particular feelings of anger) and beliefs about efficacy of a cause (van Zomeren, et al., 2008; see also Alberici & Milesi, 2013; Becker, 2012). The Kony2012 material also explicitly dealt with these factors. Enslaving children is a clear violation of moral standards, and Kony was presented at the top of a global list of criminals indicted by the International Criminal Court. The content of the film represented his continued freedom and activities as a clear case of global injustice. The film also emphasized efficacy by celebrating the past success of Invisible Children's campaigns and suggested specific mechanisms to ensure future success (Waldorf, 2013). In short, it seems that content of the video drew upon the three factors – social identity, feelings of injustice, and efficacy – that, according to recent models of collective action are expected to impact on commitment to action (see van Zomeren et al., 2008, for a meta-analysis; Becker, 2012).

Social Identity: Emergent or Transformed?

Of the three pathways that it specifies, the *social identity model of collective action* (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008) places social identity at the heart of collective mobilization. According to SIMCA, social identification has a direct relationship with collective action; but it also has an indirect relationship with action because it stimulates collective appraisals of injustice and group efficacy. From the perspective of SIMCA, the Kony2012 video would have triggered a contextually meaningful social identity that promoted the group-based experience of injustice, efficacy, and consequently, action. In this

way, the identity provides the basis for the experience of emotional (injustice) and instrumental (efficacy) approaches to coping (van Zomeren et al., 2004).

We are also interested here in an alternative set of relationships anticipated by the *encapsulated model of social identity in collective action* (EMSICA: Thomas et al., 2009; 2012). EMSICA also places social identity at the heart of collective action but suggests that social identification may *emerge* from the appraisal of injustice and group efficacy beliefs (see also van Zomeren et al., 2008, who anticipate this causal direction). EMSICA therefore anticipates indirect effects of feelings of injustice and efficacy on action through social identification. From the perspective of EMSICA, viewing the Kony2012 video would have triggered feelings of injustice (anger or outrage) and a belief in the efficacy of co-ordinated action; these then formed the basis for the emergence of a contextually meaningful social identity. The current research goes beyond a consideration of the *nature* of the social identities implicated here (global and opinion-based social identities) to consider the *function* of those identities in Kony2012 (transforming or emergent).

The Current Research

This analysis aims to develop a social psychological analysis of global internet phenomena like Kony2012 by answering three key questions. First, are there differences between supporters and non-supporters in terms of the features identified by the social psychological literature on collective action? Scholars have been at pains to differentiate these modern forms of protest from the more traditional forms of action that have typically been considered in the collective action literature (see Bennett & Segerberg, 2011, 2012; Castells, 2012, for discussions). If this is the case, then we would not necessarily expect supporters to be characterised by those attributes that predict traditional socio-political action (e.g. identity, injustice, efficacy; van Zomeren et al., 2008). On the other hand, if Kony2012 action is describable in the terms of traditional socio-political action, we would expect supporters to

feel angrier, have stronger collective efficacy beliefs and be more willing to take action, than non-supporters. Given the widespread publicity questioning the legitimacy of the campaign, we would also expect that those who remained supportive were able to overcome their doubts while the non-supporters were not (e.g. Haslam & Reicher, 2012).

Moreover, if there are indeed differences between supporters and non-supporters then that would suggest that it is worth studying the supporters more closely. Therefore, a second goal is to consider the nature (global or opinion-based) and function (transforming or emergent) of social identity for supporters of the Kony2012 campaign. Given the theoretical centrality of social identity in coordinated social behaviour (Turner, et al., 1987) we ask whether the response to Kony2012 is better described as the mobilization of global social identification or the formation of an emergent opinion-based group. In other words, is this a phenomenon most associated with appeals to a (pre-existing) global identity that becomes subjectively transformed as people come in to contact with the Kony2012 movement; or is the phenomenon associated with the emergence of a new (opinion-based) identity that comes to capture initial reactions of injustice and efficacy? Our analysis seeks to determine which set of causal relations and which identities better describe Kony2012 action.

Third, since much of the momentum of the Kony2012 campaign was generated online through the posting and sharing of the YouTube clip on social media, we ask: do the same relationships hold for Kony2012 action generally as compared with actions taken specifically through social media (Facebook and Twitter)? While some research has considered the distinction between online and offline actions more generally, results are mixed. For example, Soon and Kluver (2014) found that political blogging (commonly viewed as a "narcissistic activity", p. 500) promoted the emergence of collective identity which drove collective action both online and offline. However, other research (exploring online socio-political action more broadly) has suggested that mobilization attempts are specific to media: face-to-face

mobilization attempts promote offline actions, while online mobilization attempts promote online actions (Vissers, Hooghe, Stolle, & Maheo, 2012; see also Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). Given the centrality of social media in the success generated by the Kony2012 campaign (and, indeed, new repertoires more generally; Bennett & Segerberg, 2011, 2012), the current research compares the predictors of engagement in Kony2012 social media action with Kony2012 action overall. We also include a behavioural measure (i.e. contacting a political decision maker) to compare findings of the self-reported Kony2012 action/s with an observable, traditional socio-political action.

Method

Shortly after the release of the Kony2012 video we collected three separate samples of survey responses from people present in the public areas of the campuses of two Australian universities. Wave 1 was two weeks before the day of action; Wave 2 was on the day of action (April 20); Wave 3 was two weeks after the day of action. Wave 1 began a month after the initial surge of interest and two weeks after negative publicity in relation to the conduct of the director of the video. Demographic details (age and gender) for participants across the three waves are displayed in Table 1.

Measures

Participants were approached by the researchers and asked if they had heard of the Kony2012 campaign. If they had, they were given some written information about the study and asked if they would like to participate in exchange for a small bar of chocolate. Of the people approached, only a minority had not heard of the campaign (~10%); approximately 70% of people approached were prepared to participate. The questionnaire, titled "Attitudes towards Kony2012", involved a constant set of items with additional items in Wave 3 to assess involvement in the day of action. The full set of measures is available from the authors but the measures we focus on here are presented below.[1] Except where indicated all items

were measured on 7 point scales (typically anchored 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 7 "Strongly Agree").

The key measures were:

Campaign legitimacy. In order to account for the role of the breakdown of legitimacy of the campaign in movement (de)mobilization, two items measured the perceived campaign legitimacy: "How legitimate do you believe the focus of the Kony campaign to be?", "How legitimate do you believe the Kony campaign to be?", with Cronbach's α at all waves $> .90$.

Anti-Kony attitudes. Attitudes were measured with two items: "Joseph Kony should be arrested so that he can be charged with war crimes" and "Joseph Kony should be prosecuted with the full force of international law", with Cronbach's α at all waves $> .84$.

Anger toward Kony. Affective reactions to injustice tend to be better predictors than cognitive reactions (van Zomeren et al., 2008) so we measured injustice with three items assessing the emotional reaction of anger: "Thinking about the situation in Uganda and Joseph Kony's continued freedom, I feel [Outraged/ Angry/ Fired-up]" with Cronbach's $\alpha >$ .84.

Group efficacy. This was measured with two uncorrelated items of which only the first item ("Together Kony2012 supporters can bring Joseph Kony to justice") was strongly related to other theoretically relevant constructs and was retained.[2]

Anti-Kony opinion-based social identification. Participants were first asked to respond to an item which assessed nominal opinion-based group membership. Participants responded "yes" or "no" to the question: "Do you think of yourself as someone who supports the Kony2012 campaign?"

This categorical item was followed with five questions (one item from each of the five factors in Leach et al.'s, 2008, scale) which assessed the *degree* of social identification with the anti-Kony opinion-based group. The items were: "I feel a bond with other supporters of

the Kony2012 campaign", "I often think about the fact that I am a supporter of the Kony2012 campaign", "I have a lot in common with other supporters of the Kony2012 campaign", and "I am glad to be a supporter of the Kony2012 campaign". Although these items are intended to comprise a multidimensional measure the five items held together as a single scale, $\alpha > .81$ across waves, that we have retained for comparability with the (unidimensional) global identification measure.

   Global social identification. The three item scale developed by Buchan et al. (2011) was used to measure global social identification, e.g, "How strongly do you feel attachment to the world as a whole", $\alpha > .83$.

   Kony 2012 self-reported action. Contemporary self-reported Kony2012 action was measured on seven items in all three waves. Participants read that: "The Kony campaign calls for supporters to send messages to prominent people identified on their web site and to join an international day of action on April 20". They then indicated whether they had engaged in a range of Kony2012 actions by responding (yes/no) to the following items: "I have already posted about Kony on Facebook or Twitter", "I have already made a donation to the campaign", "I have already bought the Kony2012 kit", I have already talked to friends and family about the Kony2012 campaign", "I have already contacted a government official outlining my support", "I have already sent a message to one of the people listed on the Kony2012 website outlining my support", "I have already made a pledge" (signing a pledge was intended to indicate commitment to Invisible Children). In Wave 3 we also asked "Did you participate in the day of action on the 20th April?" Note that we also asked about intentions to perform each of these behaviours (see Ajzen, 1991); the results of these analyses are reported in supplementary analyses.

   Table 1 shows that, with the exception of two items assessing posting about Kony on Facebook or Twitter ('posting'), and talking to friends and family ('talking'), the reported

incidence of the other self-reported actions was extremely low (with only a handful of people completing the other actions across wave). Accordingly, we created a composite variable ('other actions') that was scored one if any one or more of the five low-incidence actions (denoted with [*] in Table 1) was true. We retained the 'posting' and 'talking' variables so that we ultimately had three indicators of self-reported Kony action ('posting', 'talking' and the 'other actions' variable); these formed a latent variable of overall *Kony self-reported action*. Given that posting on social media (Facebook, Twitter) was the prototypical 'new repertoire' and Kony2012 action, and our interest in comparing the different forms of action, we used the 'posting' variable as an indicator of *Kony social media action* specifically.

Kony observed action. As a behavioural measure of a traditional socio-political action relevant to the Kony2012 campaign, participants were presented with copies of unsigned form letters to the Australian Foreign Minister supporting or opposing efforts to bring Kony to justice. Participants could sign one or other letter if they chose. There were 7 people who signed only the opposition letter and 17 participants who signed both letters. These 17 participants were coded as not signing the supporting letter as we assumed they had misunderstood the measure but they were retained in all other analyses.

Results

Preliminary Analyses and Statement of Strategy

5 respondents did not complete the survey, had large amounts of missing data and were therefore removed from the analysis leaving $N = 299$. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the key variables at the three waves and correlations are shown in Table 2. Note that we display the descriptive statistics for the raw self-reported action variables rather than the latent variable. Apart from a significant reduction in efficacy associated with Wave 3, $F(2, 287) = 3.42$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, $p = .03$, there were no differences in means or frequencies between waves (all ps .10-.91). The lack of differences across the three waves likely reflects the fact

that doubts about the legitimacy of the campaign had already surfaced by the time we took the initial (Wave 1) measurement 2 weeks before the Cover the Night action: that is, the campaign had already peaked and plateaued by the time we conducted our Wave 1 measurement. The chart of Google trends (number of people searching Kony) displayed by Curtis and McCarthy (2012) shows a spike of activity between the 4th and 11th of March but a flat line of activity thereafter (including at the time of Wave 1 measurement on the 6th April). We have nevertheless taken account of wave in the analyses below.

Note that our data are comprised of both supporters and non-supporters of the movement. We consider the differences between supporters and nonsupporters, and the role of global identification using the entire data set, however, it does not make sense to include measures of degree of identification (in our tests of SIMCA and EMSICA) for those who do not identify as supporters. Accordingly, the tests of the function of identification involve only self-defined supporters of the movement ($n = 163$).

Main Analyses

Are there differences between Kony2012 supporters and non-supporters? Of the 299 participants, 163 described themselves as supporters of the anti-Kony movement by selecting 'yes' on the nominal group membership item and 136 either indicated that they did not or failed to respond ($n = 28$; these people were retained in the analysis as 'non-supporters'). To explore our first question, we explored the differences between supporters and non-supporters using 2 (group membership) X 3 (wave) ANOVA in terms of the dependent variables campaign legitimacy, anger, efficacy, and global social identification, and the action variables. There were no significant effects involving wave (all main and interaction effects were $p > .09$) except for one marginal group membership by wave interaction effect on group efficacy, $F(1, 275) = 2.91$, $p = .056$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Supporters had stronger efficacy beliefs as evidenced in the main effect, $Ms = 4.39$ vs. 2.71, $F(1, 275) =$

73.53, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, but this difference dropped after the day of action (Wave 3), $Ms =$ 3.90 vs. 2.74.

Supporters expressed fewer doubts than did non-supporters about the legitimacy of the campaign, $Ms = 4.43$ vs. 2.95, $F (1, 275) = 75.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$, held stronger anti-Kony attitudes, $Ms = 6.41$ vs. 5.63, $F (1, 284) = 27.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and felt greater anger toward Kony, $Ms = 5.07$ vs. 4.11, $F (1, 274) = 27.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. There were no differences in global identification, $Ms = 4.52$ vs. 4.32, $F (1, 288) = 1.37$, $p = .24$.

Self-reported action ('posting', 'talking' and 'other action') and observed action were measured on binary variables so we used logistic regression with the same group membership (supporter/non-supporter) and wave variables including a centered interaction term to test for effects. Consistent with the findings above, supporters were more likely to have posted on social media, 33.1% vs. 14.5%, $W (1) = 12.68$, $p < .001$, Exp B = 2.92, talked to friends and family, 67.7%% vs. 40.9%, $W (1) = 21.36$, $p < .001$, Exp B = 3.15, undertaken one of the other Kony actions, 18.0% vs. 7.7%, $W (1) = 6.06$, $p = .01$, Exp B = .38, and completed the behavioural measure (letter signing), 39.2% vs. 18.2%, $W (1) = 14.27$, $p < .001$, Exp B = 2.89; there were no effects of wave and the interaction was not significant for any of the action variables. We conclude that there are indeed differences between Kony supporters and non-supporters on the key variables identified in the collective action literature. The supplementary analyses report the results of a discriminant function analysis showing that these measures also differentiate supporters from non-supporters[3].

What is the nature of social identification in Kony2012? Table 2 helps us to differentiate between attitudes, opinion-based social identification and global identification. As can be seen in the table, there is a significant, moderate sized correlation (Cohen, 1988) between global identification and opinion-based identification (for supporters) but there are weak correlations between the attitude measure and the two identification measures. This

pattern of results suggests that these constructs can be clearly distinguished: holding an anti-Kony attitude was not the same as identifying with an anti-Kony opinion-based group, and the two forms of identification had a divergent predictive pattern suggesting that they are indeed unique constructs. Table 2 also shows that global identification does not predict self-reported or observed action and is a weak predictor of anger and efficacy. These weak correlations refute the utility of global identification in explaining Kony2012. We report a further test of the role of global identification in supplementary analyses however we focus on opinion-based social identification in our tests of the function of social identification.

What is the function of social identification in Kony2012? To address the third research question, we conducted a series of multigroup structural equation models (SEM) using Amos 22. Wave was the grouping variable and we modeled effects on three action outcomes: self-reported Kony action generally (latent factor), social media action specifically (posting on Facebook and Twitter), and the observed (behavioural) measure of Kony2012 traditional action. We included only self-defined supporters of the movement ($n = 163$). Employing a multigroup SEM allows us to test for the possibility that there were differences in correlations across the three waves; that is, beyond mean level differences, it allows us to consider whether the predictors are the same across the three measurement points.

To assess model fit we report several widely accepted goodness-of-fit indices. Commonly reported indices include Bentler's (1990) comparative fit index (CFI), a nonnormed index which compares the given model with a null model. Good fit is shown for the CFI when the values are greater than .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Second, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) corrects for model complexity and shows adequate fit when it is .08 or less (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Finally, we also report the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), which is useful when comparing models that are not nested; a smaller value represents a better fitting, parsimonious model. Table 3 shows the fit statistics for the six

models. For all six models we found acceptable fit for models where weights, intercepts and residuals were constrained to be equal across the three waves, suggesting that there were no differences in the relationships across wave.

   Kony2012 action. We first tested SIMCA, including opinion-based social identification, anger and group efficacy as direct predictors of action, with anger and efficacy mediating the indirect effect of identification on action (see Figure 1). Table 3 shows that the fit statistics were excellent and Figure 1 shows that all the paths were significant except for the path between efficacy-action. Bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples revealed that the standardized indirect effect (*IE*) of identity on action through anger was significant (*IE* = 0.04, *SE* = 0.01, *95% CI* = 0.01, 0.07), whereas the parallel effect for efficacy (*IE* = -0.03, *SE* = 0.02, *95% CI* = -0.08, 0.01) was not significant. We next tested EMSICA, including opinion-based social identification as a direct predictor of action, with social identification mediating the indirect effect of group efficacy and anger on action. Table 3 shows that the fit statistics were good; see Figure 2. Tests of indirect effects showed that the indirect effect of anger on action through identity was significant (*IE* = 0.04, *SE* = 0.02, *95% CI* = 0.02, 0.09), as was the effect of efficacy on action through identity (*IE* = 0.07, *SE* = 0.02, *95% CI* = 0.04, 0.12). Comparing the AIC of the two self-reported models suggests that the SIMCA model may be more parsimonious (Table 3) but given the small magnitude of the difference (less than the rule of thumb nominated by Burnham and Anderson, 2002, of 2.0) we conclude that both versions of EMSICA and SIMCA fit the data. That aside, anti-Kony social identification is the strongest predictor of self-reported action.

   Kony2012 social media action. We tested the same models using self-reported posting in social media (Facebook and Twitter) as the dependent variable (see Table 3). The model fitted the data well although Figure 3 (values to the left of the backslash) shows that the efficacy-action path was again non-significant and the anger-action path was marginal. The

indirect effect through anger was significant (*IE* = 0.21, *SE* = 0.08, *95% CI* = 0.08, 0.40), but

not for efficacy (*IE* = -.0.19, *SE* = 0.12, *95% CI* = -0.04, 0.45). EMSICA also fitted the data

well and Figure 4 (values to the left of the backslash) indicates that the paths were all

significant. The indirect effect of anger through identity was not significant (*IE* = 0.10, *SE* =

0.07, *95% CI* = -0.009, 0.27), but the effect of efficacy through identity was (*IE* = 0.22, *SE* =

0.09, *95% CI* = 0.07, 0.42). Comparing the AIC suggests that SIMCA was again slightly more

parsimonious.

>   ***Observed action.*** Regarding the measure of observed action (letter signing), the

SIMCA model showed adequate fit, although the chi-square was significant and the RMSEA

was borderline (Table 3). Figure 3 (values to the right of the backslash) shows that the direct

path predicted by SIMCA from efficacy to action was nonsignificant (*p* = .36) and the path

from anger to action was marginal (*p* = .06). The indirect effect of identity on action was not

significant for anger (*IE* = 0.04, *SE* = 0.08, *95% CI* = -0.08, 0.22) or efficacy (*IE* = 0.02, *SE* =

0.12, *95% CI* = -0.21, 0.28). On the other hand, Table 3 shows that EMSICA demonstrated

good fit and Figure 4 (values to the right of the backslash) shows that all the paths were

significant. Tests of the indirect effects showed that the indirect effect of anger on action

through identity (*IE* = 0.15, *SE* = 0.06, *95% CI* = 0.04, 0.30) and the effect of efficacy on

action through identity (*IE* = 0.16, *SE* = 0.08, *95% CI* = 0.02, 0.34) were both significant.

This is consistent with the effects of efficacy and anger being encapsulated by social

identification. The AIC of the two models is the same.

>   Regarding the question of whether the same relationships applied to Kony2012 action

generally as compared to engagement in social media action, it is striking that a very similar

pattern of results prevailed across the two self-reported forms of action (Kony action and

social media action). We found slightly better fit for SIMCA in both models (as demonstrated

by the AIC; Table 3) but the SIMCA tests also contained a non-significant path from efficacy

to action and, for social media action (Figure 3, values to the left), a marginal path from anger to action. These non-significant paths are more consistent with encapsulation. Indeed, for the observed action measure, the tests of SIMCA also contained one marginal and one non-significant path and this also suggests better support for EMSICA. Nevertheless, we can conclude that the same factors that were implicated in self-reported Kony2012 action generally applied also to an observable traditional socio-political action (that is, contacting a political decision maker) and to those actions associated with the 'new repertoires of protest' (that is, posting on social media; Polletta, 2011).

Discussion

There is widespread consensus within the social psychological literature that social identity is central to understanding traditional collective mobilization but some scholars have suggested that social identity is no longer relevant to modern forms of mobilization (Earl & Kimport, 2011). The current research sought to develop an analysis of a global Internet phenomenon in psychological terms.

Results showed that supporters of Kony2012 were markedly different from non-supporters on the dimensions identified by the traditional collective action literature: they held stronger anti-Kony attitudes, greater anger towards Kony, believed in the effectiveness of action and took more (self-reported and observed) action. In view of the widespread criticism of the campaign after its initial surge of popularity, it is noteworthy that supporters of the campaign were less likely to express doubts about the legitimacy of the campaign. It is likely that some of the non-supporters would have classed themselves as supporters if they had not developed doubts based on that criticism. It is unfortunate that, due to the viral nature of the campaign and the need for appropriate ethical review, we were not able to commence data collection until after criticisms had emerged and are therefore unable to empirically disentangle these processes.

Moreover, although previous work identifies global identity as the basis for global cooperation (Buchan et al., 2011) and global human rights (McFarland et al., 2012, 2013), the current results suggest that the psychological process underpinning support for Kony2012 is better understood as commitment to an emergent opinion-based identity (Bliuc et al., 2007). Consistent with other research which advances a privileged role for identity in collective action, results pointed to *both* the transforming and emergent role of identity. We found support for the idea that the anti-Kony identity acted to promote the expression of anger and (more tentatively) efficacy, both directly and indirectly promoting action (as per SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008). We also found support for the encapsulated model of social identity in collective action (EMSICA) whereby participants first experienced feelings of injustice, believed in the effectiveness of coordinated action – and these formed the basis for the emergence of a contextually meaningful identity based on those reactions (Thomas et al., 2009, 2012).

Although our original intention was to investigate quantitative and qualitative shifts in the movement over time (i.e. across waves; see Livingstone, 2013), the current results demonstrated a great deal of stability in responses for this period. Indeed, although we utilized a convenience sample, we found the same pattern of effects across three different samples, creating more confidence in our findings. Nevertheless, the design tests the relationships at specific time points and does not establish a causal direction. Future research might seek to complement the correlational findings here with experimental evidence that can test the two pathways in more detail. More generally, replication is important (Yong, 2012) and it is heartening that we found support for a similar pattern of factors to those documented in engagement in social movements (e.g., Mazzoni, van Zomeren & Cicognani, in press; but see Stürmer & Simon, 2009, on anger), traditional forms of collective action (e.g. van

Zomeren et al., 2008) and solidarity-based action (van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears & Bettache, 2011; Thomas et al., 2012; c.f. Subašić et al., 2008).

Finally, we found that engagement in social media action (sharing Kony2012 material on Facebook or Twitter), engagement in Kony2012 action generally and an observed traditional socio-political action (letter signing) were predicted by the same factors. In short, the results suggest that social media action was associated with a meaningful and valid expression of collective selfhood (social identity); this seems unlikely to have been the case if engagement with the cause is transient and of little enduring meaning to the participants (as was a core criticism of the Kony2012 campaign: Mengestu, 2012). Indeed, the results are consistent with other emerging research that indicates that social media use facilitates political and civic engagement, both online and offline (de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Soon & Kluver, 2014), and particularly amongst those who might otherwise disengage (Chan & Guo, 2013; Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005). In what follows we consider the implications of these results for developing an analysis of the nature and function of identity in new models and methods of social change (see Castells, 2012).

The Nature and Function of Identity in New Social Media

The results support the idea that movements such as Kony2012 find force by drawing on an orientation about the way the world should be, and creating a sense of solidarity with others who share that world view (McGarty et al., 2009; McGarty et al., 2014). As such it is consistent with previous evidence implicating the utility of opinion-based groups in understanding 'ally activism' (Russell, 2011; or solidarity-based action, see also Subašić et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2011) and humanitarian action amongst advantaged group members (Thomas et al., 2012). One of the strengths of opinion-based groups is that they transcend social categorical group boundaries (e.g. national, gender or ethnic boundaries; McGarty et al., 2009) such that members of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups can

both identify with an opinion about 'how the world should be' (Smith et al., in press). In this way, opinion-based groups seem well placed to capture emergent (new, novel) social movements such as Kony2012 because they can capture perceived discrepancies between how the world 'is' and how it 'should be' (McGarty et al., 2014; Smith, Thomas, & McGarty, in press).

On the other hand, we found little support for the role of global identity in these data. As such, the current findings stand in contrast to those of McFarland et al. (2012, 2013) who show that a superordinate identification with humanity promotes interest in, and engagement with, global human rights issues. One possibility is that global social identification is more relevant to cooperation and public goods dilemmas of the form explored by Buchan et al. (2011). Another difficulty, though, is that who belongs to – and is prototypical of – the global psychological community may be hotly contested (Reese et al., 2012; also Greenaway et al., 2011; Morton & Postmes, 2011). Thus, superordinate human and global identities may be inherently more difficult to associate with specific norms for action (Thomas et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, future research might further consider the role of other identities (including global identity) as people interact with movements, challenge powerful outgroups (see Drury & Reicher, 2000), and come to adopt new norms and values that engender productive forms of global citizenship. Indeed, it is possible that other campaigns may more successfully draw on a pre-existing identity (global or otherwise) and rhetorically link injustice and efficacy as the 'work' of group members (see Bliuc et al., 2012; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006). New emotions and beliefs may also become more relevant as the movement gains momentum or suffers set-backs (e.g., Tausch & Becker, 2013). And, given the important role ascribed to morality in recent developments in the collective action literature (e.g. van Zomeren et al., 2011, 2012;

van Zomeren, 2013), future research should consider the role of (absolute) moral positions in precipitating and sustaining involvement in these forms of movements.

Although we have focused our discussion here on the effects of modern social media, in many ways attitudes, anger, efficacy and identity are also temporal outcomes of what is a more distal, communicative, process. That is, much of what makes social media such a powerful tool for social change is their potential to enable rapid communication across time and space (Castells, 2012; McGarty et al., 2014, for a case study), and the fact that they provide social spaces for people to share, discuss and contest their positions (e.g., Soon & Kluver, 2014; see Thomas, Smith, McGarty & Postmes, 2010 more generally). Indeed, Bennett and Segerberg (2011) describe modern forms of social mobilization as *connective* (not collective) action. Social psychology is well placed to contribute an analysis of social influence in modern forms of mobilization (following Spears et al., 2002) and, in this vein, future research should consider aspects of the online environment in which potential participants encounter and experience mobilizing content (see also Thomas & Louis, 2014, for an account of collective action as social influence).

New Forms of Mass Mobilization and Social Change

Kony2012 was criticized for its failure to achieve its stated policy objective and generate significant offline action, giving rise to a rather grim view of modern social movements (e.g. Gladwell, 2010, for social media more broadly). Consistent with this view, the average levels of psychological commitment to the anti-Kony group considered here were not high. That is, although participants held strongly anti-Kony attitudes, the campaign itself was not strongly self-defining (the average level of identification with the group was weak), and it may be that their action reflected this. Moreover, the data point to a key limitation of the campaign. Specifically, key actions requested by the campaign organizers required a very high commitment from new supporters of the cause. Supporters were asked to purchase a

$US30 kit from an online store and to put up posters on the night of April 20 "after sundown" (creating what Klandermans, 1997, would term a 'barrier to participation' for many young people) without identifying specific locations. We suspect that if the organizers of the Egyptian protests of 2011 had expected protesters to pay to participate, and had neglected to suggest that protesters assemble in a specific place (Tahrir Square), then they would have failed to generate action too.

However, rather than denigrating modern forms of mobilization we believe our data also supports an alternative, more positive, view. Rather than pre-judge actions as effective or ineffective (c.f. Hornsey et al., 2006), a perspective grounded in social interactionism would ask how participants subjectively understand and evaluate their actions (e.g. Turner & Oakes, 1986). Our data showed that similar processes underpinned engagement in a range of self-reported actions, observed action, and an action characteristic of new repertoires of protest (posting on social media). The Kony2012 video is juxtaposed with images of people taking action online, as the narrator implores "The better world we want is coming, it's just waiting for us to stop at nothing" (Invisible Children, 2012). There is therefore good reason to think that participants believed that, by sharing the YouTube video or 'liking' it on Facebook, they were directly supporting a campaign to capture a war criminal (Waldorf, 2013). Kony2012 exposed people to a powerful delegitimizing narrative and presented them with achievable action, allowing them to overcome uncertainty and act to embody imagined cognitive alternatives, all vital components of a *psychology of resistance* (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Judging the effectiveness of modern movements based on the yardstick of traditional methods (rallies, petitions) will limit the potential of the social and behavioural sciences to develop explanations of these phenomena.

Writing on the topic of the Occupy movement, Castells (2012, p.193) notes that Occupy did not achieve widespread policy change but that it "shifted public discourse". One

of the protesters put it differently, writing on the Occupy Facebook page: "*The process is the message*" (see Castells, 2012, p. 203, italics added). Given that policy change has been linked to public opinion (e. g., Burstein, 2003; see also Louis, 2009) a more positive view of the achievements of modern forms of social mobilization seems well-founded. Indeed, the current analysis suggests a nuanced view of the effect and impact of social media on social change. The use of social media entails real communication between real people: it cannot be ignored as part of some other "virtual" world (Jurgenson, 2012). The fact that around 30% of participants were prepared to sign a letter to a government minister points to the (untapped) power of the campaign to create impressive levels of conventional political action alongside online interaction.

Footnote

[1] Other measures focused on the perceived locus of responsibility, norms of opinion and action and degree of political trust within the national (Australian) and global community. For those participants that reported having taken action, we also asked about how that made them feel (hopeful, proud).

[2] The second efficacy item read: "Efforts to bring Kony to justice are a waste of everyone's effort" (reverse scored). Compared to the magnitude of the correlations of the first item (see Table 2; rs = .31-.69), this item was only weakly correlated with action, anti-Kony attitudes, anger and anti-Kony identification (rs = .14-.17).

[3] For completeness we also ran the wave X group analyses excluding the 28 participants who did not answer the question about opinion-based group membership. The pattern of main effects for group membership was unchanged but there were some additional wave X group interactions of small size that were significant in the range p = .03 to .08. Given the focus on opinion-based membership in the next section we have not interpreted these effects.

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Table 1. *Means (Standard Deviations) of Key Variables by Wave*

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
N	95	102	102
Age	20.67 (4.55)	20.26 (4.18)	21.27 (5.31)
% Female	45.3	60.8	48.0
Attitudes	6.02 (1.38)	6.03 (1.50)	6.17 (0.96)
Anger	4.62 (1.63)	4.78 (1.55)	4.57 (1.52)
Group efficacy	3.92 [a] (1.84)	3.82 [a] (1.92)	3.28 [b] (1.73)
Global identification	4.60 (1.34)	4.51 (1.38)	4.17 (1.44)
Anti-Kony identification	3.95 (1.14)	3.52 (1.11)	3.62 (1.17)
Perceived legitimacy	3.84 (1.58)	3.63 (1.51)	3.90 (1.65)
% Observed action	30.3	33.0	25.3
% Posted about Kony	23.2	25.5	24.5
% Talked to friends, family	52.6	57.8	53.9
% Donated[*]	6.3	3.9	6.9
% Purchased kit[*]	6.3	3.9	1.0
% Made a pledge[*]	10.5	2.9	6.9
% Contacted official[*]	2.1	2.9	2.9
% Message Kony targets[*]	3.2	2.0	2.0
% Day of Action	--	--	2.0

Notes.   Cell sizes vary with missing data and, in the case of the observed action, those who signed both letters were removed from the analysis. For anti-Kony social identification values are for supporters only ($n = 163$). [*] Denotes those self-reported variables that were combined to form the 'other action' variable. Means/frequencies with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

Table 2. *Correlations of Key Dependent Variables across Wave (N = 299)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Group membership	-	.28***	.30***	.46***	…	.08***	.45***	.21***	.27***	.15***	.23***
2. Attitudes		-	.53***	.31***	.10	.11	.31***	.22***	.26	.13*	.15*
3. Anger			-	.44***	.42***	.13*	.43***	.44***	.43**	.20**	.30***
4. Group efficacy				-	.59***	.19***	.54***	.44***	.51***	.11*	.28***
5. Anti-Kony identification					-	.35***	.49***	.51***	.58***	.23**	.26***
6. Global identification						-	.11	.16**	.19	.08	.02
7. Legitimacy							-	.44***	.51**	.17**	.29***
8. Self-reported posting								-	.61***	.39***	.25***
9. Self-reported talk									-	.26**	.20**
10. Self-reported other action										-	.38***
11. Observed action											-

NB: Group membership coded supporter = 1, non-supporter = -1. For anti-Kony social identification values are for supporters only (*n* = 163).

Table 3. *Fit Statistics for the SIMCA (Figures 1 and 3) and EMSICA (Figure 2 and 4) Models*

for Kony Action, Social Media Action and Observed Action.

	Fit statistics				
Variable	CFI	RMSEA	χ^2 (*df*)	*p*	AIC
SIMCA all action	.96	.04	75.48 (55)	.04	127.48
SIMCA social media	1.00	.00	24.67 (29)	.55	50.67
SIMCA observed	1.00	.08	21.20 (29)	.85	47.20
EMSICA all action	.95	.04	80.93 (56)	.02	130.93
ESIMCA social media	1.00	.00	28.35 (30)	.55	52.35
ESIMCA observed	1.00	.00	23.80 (30)	.78	47.80
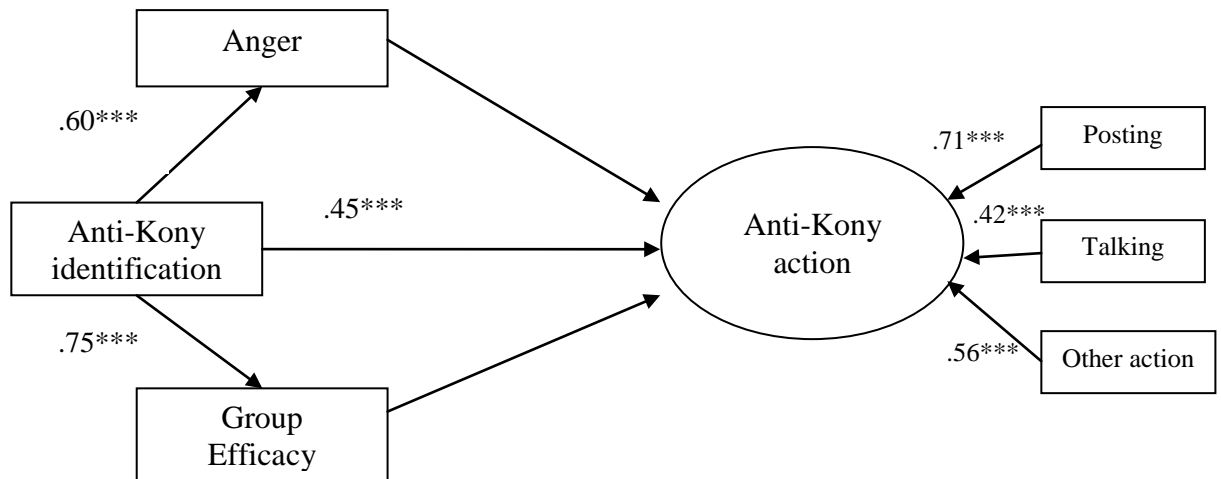
Figure 1. Standardized regression coefficients for the structural model of the social identity model of collective action predicting Kony2012 action. *** denotes that path is significant at *p* < .001. ** denotes that path is significant at *p* < .01. * denotes that path is significant at *p* < .05.
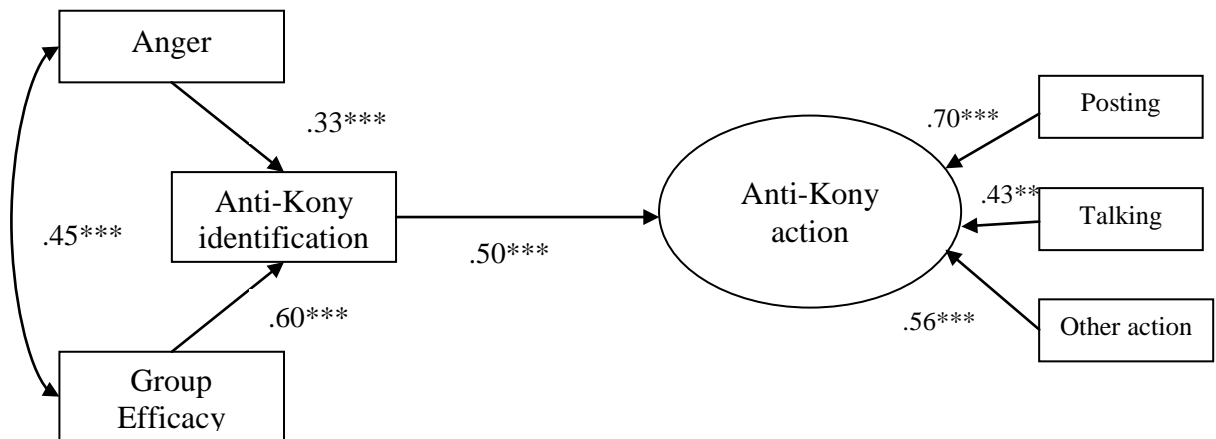
Figure 2. Standardized regression coefficients for the structural model of the

encapsulated model of social identity in collective action predicting Kony2012 action. [***]

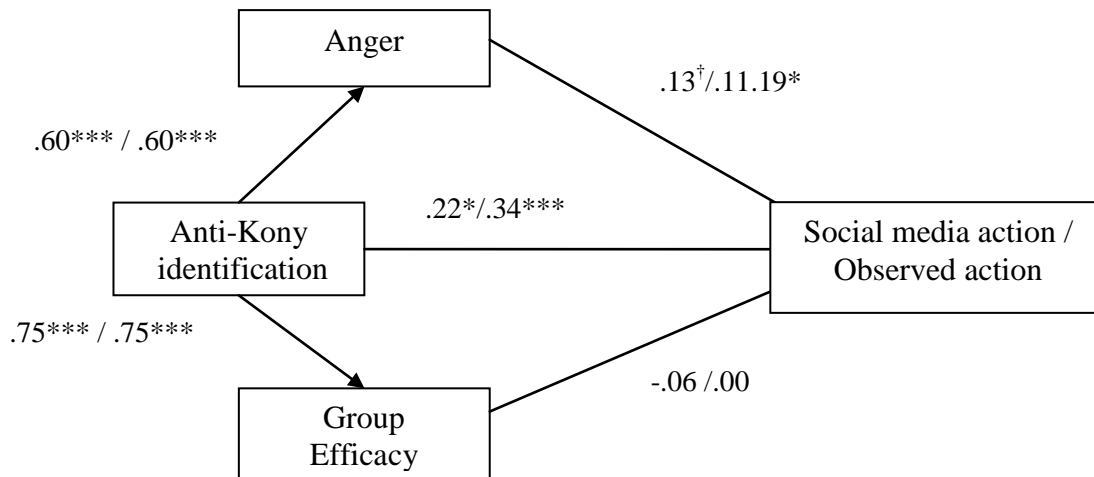denotes that path is significant at $p < .001$, ** denotes that path is significant at $p < .01$.

Figure 3. Standardized regression coefficients for the structural model of the social identity model of collective action. Figures to the left of the backslash relate to the values for Kony social media action; figures to the right of the backslash relate to the value for the measure of observed action (letter signing). *** denotes that path is significant at $p < .001$. ** denotes that path is significant at $p < .01$. * denotes that path is significant at $p < .05$. † denotes that path is marginally significant at $p = .06$.
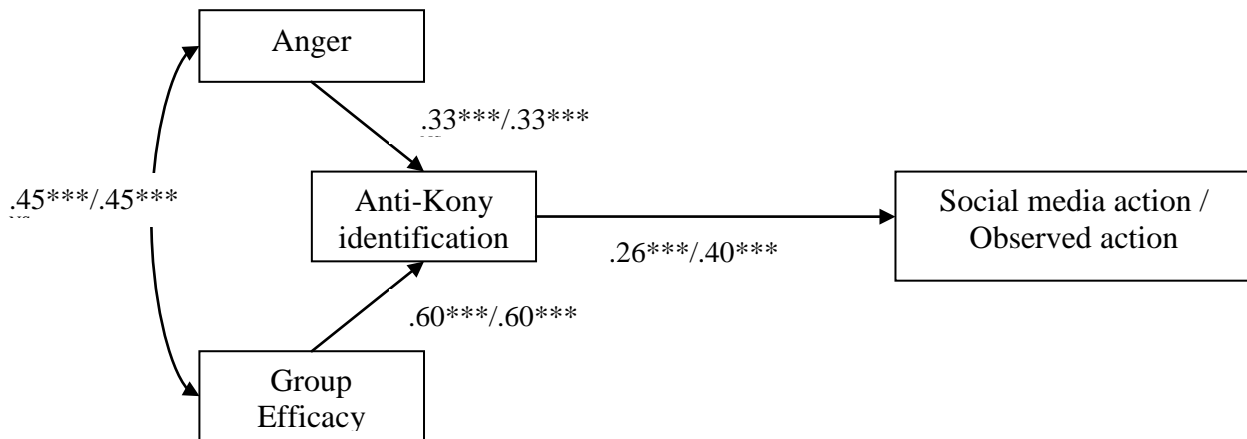
Figure 4. Standardized regression coefficients for the structural model of the encapsulated model of social identity in collective action. Figures to the left of the backslash relate to the values for Kony social media action; figures to the right of the backslash relate to the value for the measure of observed action (letter signing). *** denotes that path is significant at $p < .001$.