

The role of social identity in opinion-based groups in shaping attitudes and social behavior

Abstract

In recent years, social identity within opinion-based groups has emerged as a key construct in understanding social behaviors motivated at the individual level (Thomas & McGarty, 2009). A sense of belonging to a group formed around shared opinions is not merely a consequence of being assigned to a specific socio-demographic category (e.g., nationality or gender) but is associated with authentic engagement, reflecting individuals' genuine beliefs and attitudes (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010).

In this dissertation, I examined how social identity in opinion-based groups correlates with attitude formation and social behavior. I aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) what factors moderate the relationship between social identity in opinion-based groups and engagement in various forms of intra- and intergroup cooperation?; (2) what function does social identity serve in opinion-based groups in the context of collective actions in virtual environments?; (3) what role does social identity in opinion-based groups play in shaping attitudes toward artificial intelligence (AI)?

These hypotheses were tested in a series of six studies, forming a cohesive cycle of three first-author publications. The first study (Publication 1) demonstrated a positive association between social identity in opinion-based groups and intergroup phenomena such as collective action, online activism, and prejudice reduction. Additionally, three significant moderators were identified as responsible for the overall variability in effect sizes: (1) the operationalization of the social identity variable, (2) the type of group action, and (3) the form of participation (declarative vs. actual behavior). The second study (Publication 2) focused on the role of social identity in engagement with crowdfunding campaigns. It was found that stronger identification with a group supporting climate change mitigation predicted a higher intention to participate in crowdfunding campaigns related to this cause. This effect was replicated in the third study within the context of a campaign promoting cultural diversity. However, in the fourth study examining actual financial contributions, the effect size was significantly lower, suggesting a discrepancy between declared intentions and real-world behaviors. The fifth study (Publication 3) investigated the role of social identity in shaping attitudes toward artificial intelligence. The findings revealed that individuals

identifying as AI development supporters exhibited more accepting attitudes toward an AI-based application modeled after ChatGPT. Furthermore, an analysis of predictors of AI acceptance showed that incorporating group-based factors (e.g., identification with AI supporters) significantly improved the explanatory power of the model compared to an individual-level approach. In a subsequent study, perceived controllability of AI's mental states was found to moderate the relationship between social identity and attitudes toward AI—participants demonstrated greater acceptance of AI when it was portrayed as having predictable and controllable intentions.

In conclusion, this research series, employing a diverse methodological approach—including meta-analysis, narrative review, correlational studies, and quasi-experimental designs—provided evidence that shared opinions can serve as a robust foundation for the formation of group identity. Social identity in opinion-based groups shapes various aspects of intergroup dynamics, particularly in the context of emerging social phenomena such as engagement in crowdfunding campaigns and interactions with artificial intelligence.

Keywords: group identity, social identity, opinion-based groups, collective action, crowdfunding, artificial intelligence, controllability of mental states, attitudes towards artificial intelligence