Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the motivational factors and processes people went through before participating or not participating in the social media activism of the Ice Bucket Challenge (IBC). Through an analysis of 10 focus groups containing a total of 73 participants, this article develops a model that illustrates the processes and factors influencing (non)participation. Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model for theoretical grounding, this article finds that participants initially process the IBC through rational and affective routes. These initial routes are influenced by motivational and de-motivational factors, which also effect whether participants complete or do not complete the IBC. These findings suggest several implications for future social media activism research and also practical implications for future social media campaign managers. These implications are discussed, along with limitations and future directions.
“Attention Whores” and “Other People’s Shoes”: Exploring Participation and Nonparticipation in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge

In the summer of 2014, social media feeds were filled with videos of people dousing themselves with ice-cold water. Originally started as a way to donate to any charity, the Ice Bucket Challenge (IBC) quickly morphed into a social media campaign for those with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS; more commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease) (Sifferlin, 2014). Although different news and media outlets contest the origin of the IBC, there is agreement that the challenge gained momentum and became a national phenomenon between June and September of 2014 (James, 2014; Steel, 2014). The IBC is easy to understand: People were challenged to make a video of themselves dumping ice-cold water on their heads or they could donate money towards ALS. These videos were shared on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. After making a video, people challenged (via social media) others to participate. The idea was to have people either donating money towards ALS or spreading awareness about ALS through social media videos.

On Facebook, there were over 17 million videos made (Steel, 2014). In addition to the layperson, many celebrities, including Tom Cruise, LeBron James, Justin Timberlake, and Taylor Swift, also participated in the IBC. Both laypeople and celebrities also donated money. The ALS Association reported that over 115 million dollars were raised through the IBC campaign. The Association’s website also saw a spike in daily views, rising to an unprecedented amount of 4.5 million views per day, compared to an average of 17,500 views per day before the IBC (Townsend, 2014). Not all responses, however, were positive. Some estimated that over 6 million gallons of water were used in the IBC (Li, 2014). In addition to water waste, Steel (2014)
reported that some people viewed the IBC negatively because the challenge promoted slacktivism and drew attention to the people doing the IBC instead of ALS.

Although there have been several research studies that have examined social media campaigning (e.g., Kang, 2012; Meyer & Bray, 2013, Peuchaud, 2014), few have examined the motivations behind participating. Penney (2014) argued that more research should be done in order to better understand what motivates people to participate in social media campaigns. The current study uses the recent IBC to examine the motivations behind people participating or not participating in social media campaigns. This study also examines the process people went through after being nominated to participate in the IBC. The goal of this study is to better understand how people process social media campaigns, and how this process eventually leads to participating or not participating in social media campaigns.

Social Media Activism

The IBC was a form of social activism, specifically social media activism. Participants were nominated via social media to dump ice-water on their heads or donate money towards the ALS Foundation, and many people quickly joined the cause, making it one of the most successful social media campaigns to date (Steel, 2014). With such success, the IBC serves as a strong case for research examining online activism. Before the rise of the social media, however, people participated in social activism in different forms. Rallies and protests often happened in physical spaces, where a collection of people gathered together to make their voices heard and known. As technology has advanced, the environment of social activism has changed (Newnham & Bell, 2012; Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). Social activism has gradually moved away from people having a physical involvement with the cause; instead, people are virtually involved (i.e., having involvement through the Internet) in different movements and causes.
“ATTENTION WHORES” AND “OTHER PEOPLE’S SHOES”

(Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). Social activism through the Internet is known as cyberactivism (see Chamberlain, 2004); today, cyberactivism is beginning to shift towards Internet activism in social media platforms (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014).

The shift towards social media activism provides benefits and drawbacks for activist causes discussed below. What will become evident through this discussion on the benefits and drawbacks of social media activism is that past studies do not examine what motivates people to participate (or not participate) in social media campaigns. Instead, past studies have just illuminated the positive and negative outcomes of social media campaigns without researching factors influencing its successes or failures. Thus, the current study examines the influential factors that motivated people to participate or not participate in the IBC.

**Drawbacks to Social Media Activism**

One drawback for social media activism is whether or not these causes create actual change. There are a few reasons for this. Briones, Madden, and Janoske (2013) argued that the impact of social media causes are difficult to determine because of *slacktivism*, where people are casually (e.g., liking a cause on Facebook) participating in social media causes without real activity for change (see also Harlow & Guo, 2014; Newnham & Bell, 2012). Since many people just participate in the online portion of the cause, the actual impact of the cause remains equivocal. McCafferty (2011) argued that “[n]o one disputes that activists’ online efforts draw greater attention to a cause, but opinion varies with respect to whether they make a significant lasting impact” (p. 17). In another study examining social media activism, participants reported being weary that social media was an easy way out, stating that social media activism lacks “enthusiasm and dedication” from people (Harlow & Guo, 2014, p. 474). Thus, social media causes could be viewed negatively because they are creating a form of pseudo-activism.
In addition to pseudo-activism, some scholars have pointed out that people engage in social media activism for reasons that are not always perceived by others as positive. For example, Lim (2013) argued people will be more willing to get involved in a social media campaign if the campaign is (1) “simple” (2) “low-risk,” and (3) “congruent with ideological meta-narratives” (p. 650). These arguments further echo the claim that social media campaigns are successful when people view the campaign as something that is easy and requires little sacrifice (see Briones et al., 2013; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Newham & Bell, 2012). In other words, social media campaigns need to require little work from the people involved in order for them to be much of a success. Thus, social media activism can be perceived to be a lazy form of activism.

Benefits of Social Media Activism

Whereas there are initial drawbacks that bring into question social media activism, other scholars argue that these campaigns do contain benefits for activism. Kang (2012) argued that middle-class Americans are rarely involved in activism; however, with the aid of social media, this demographic is getting involved. Kang’s study examined a specific example, specifically the creation of the Facebook page “Boycott Whole Foods.” Kang argued that this one Facebook page spread to other social media platforms and eventually led to people protesting Whole Foods in physical locations. Critics are concerned with social media causes confined to the online world; however, Kang’s study illustrates how social media activism is not always an online phenomenon. Instead, social media activism can spread into offline involvement as well (see also Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014).

People also believe that social media activism creates awareness (Briones et al., 2013). For example, social media activism has been used to expose sexual violence in Egypt (Peuchaud,
2014), promote feminism in Turkey (Esien-Ziya, 2013), and increase knowledge about Joseph Kony’s oppression in Africa (Briones et al., 2013). More people are being reached through social media campaigns than could be reached using other, more traditional (e.g., protesting on the street), forms of activism (Meyer & Bray, 2013; Newsom & Lengel, 2012). One reason for this is that online activism can potentially reach a global audience (Bennet, 2010; Rucht, 2004) and is not confined to certain geographic locations. Briones et al. (2013) argues that this voice of social media activism needs to be taken advantage of by activists, as awareness draws attention to the activists’ causes.

As is evident, much research has been conducted that examines the positive and negative aspects of social media activism, but little research examines the factors influencing participation in social media campaigns. Penney (2014) argued that scholars know very little about the motivations prompting participation in social media activism. Studies conducted on social media activism are often structured in a manner attempting to assess the success of a campaign, but little attention is given to why people are motivated to participate. For example, Meyer and Bray (2013) examined the campaign TWLOHA (To Write Love on Her Arms), a campaign to raise awareness about depression and suicide. Meyers and Bray argued that people participated in social media activism because they were personally influenced (e.g., by a friend) to join. Here, the question of motivation is beginning to be discussed (i.e., motivated to participate because of a personal connection), but there still remain questions unanswered. After being asked to participate in a social media campaign by a friend, are there other factors that influence participation? What if the friend is requested to participate and then doesn’t participate? In other words, what motivates a person not to participate in a social media campaign after being asked by a personal connection? The current study sets out to examine some of these questions, using
the specific case study of the IBC to do so. The current study is interested in better understanding the influences and motivations that cause people to participate or not participate in the social media activism of the IBC.

Additionally, studies examining social media activism are often associated with a political or protesting agenda. Often these types of studies examine activism that is directly tied to protesting something (such as boycotting Whole Foods) or supporting politically entrenched agendas (e.g., Penney’s [2014] study examined what motivated people to change their Facebook profile pictures to an equal sign in support of LGBT rights).

There still remains, however, other forms of social media activism where protesting and politics are not central, such as health campaigns. There has been research that has examined activism related to health issues, such as breast cancer (e.g., Lerner, 2002) and the Movember campaign (men are encouraged to grow mustaches in the month of November to raise awareness about men’s health; see Bravo & Hoffman-Goetz, 2015).

The IBC was a campaign related to a health issue, and was very similar to the Movember campaign. The difference with the IBC, however, was that this campaign had very mixed responses from people. Steel (2014) stated that people did not approve of the campaign because it detracted from the cause itself (supporting ALS victims). Gray (2014) stated that the awareness and money raised by the cause was seen as a positive, but people also felt like the campaign discouraged donations to other organizations. In fact, Gray (2014) argued that the “very nature [of the IBC] has opened itself up to a good deal more scrutiny than most other charity efforts ever face” (par. 7). Thus, with the IBC being such a contested social media campaign, the current study seeks to understand what motivated people either to participate or not participate in the
IBC. In doing so, the current study will provide results that future social media campaigns can use in knowing motivations behind participation and nonparticipation.

**Elaboration Likelihood Model**

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) states that there are two routes that are influential in processing information and changing attitudes: central and peripheral routes. The model was developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), and has been used extensively (e.g., Angst & Agarwal, 2009; Lane, Miller, Brown, & Vilar, 2013) to illustrate how people act upon information that they are given. For the central route processing, an individual has the opportunity to process a given message. This means that the individual is able to elaborate on the given message, and to make well-informed decision about the message. For the peripheral route, less thought is given to process a given message. Thus, the individual does not elaborate on the given message, and not much thought goes into what to do with the message. ELM posits that individuals act on information differently based upon the amount of thought process that happens. The central route relates to cognitive processing of messages; the peripheral route relates to affective processing of messages.

Recently, ELM has been used to show how people process Internet-based platforms. For example, ELM has been used to illustrate attitudes towards Internet recruitment sites (Gregory, Meade, Thompson, & Foster, 2013), online customer reviews (Sher & Lee, 2009), and online shopping (Yang, 2014), among others. Even with this trend towards use of Internet-based platforms, there remain few research studies that have examined ELM and social networking sites. Research should use ELM to examine persuasive effectiveness of social networking sites, especially when the social networking sites are used as a platform to motivate people towards participation in social causes. How people are motivated, either through the peripheral or central
routes, is central to ELM. The current study is interested in how people processed the information regarding the IBC, and the motivations that led to participating or not participating in the IBC. Because the current study examines the process of motivation, ELM will be used as a theoretical guide.

**Research Questions**

In short, social media campaigns are becoming the new form of activism. Whereas research has begun to examine social media campaigns, few have examined the process people experience before deciding to participate or not participate in the social media campaign. This study seeks to fill this gap of research through an examination of people who participated or did not participate in the contested IBC. Through this examination, this study aligns with Penney’s (2014) argument that more research needs to be done that examines the motivations behind social media campaigns. The following research questions guided this study:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1): What factors motivated people to participate or not participate in the IBC?
- Research Question 2 (RQ2): What process did people go through before deciding to participate or not participate in the IBC?

**Method**

After gaining Institutional Review Board approval, this exploratory study collected focus group data from ten focus groups conducted in the fall of 2014. There are several reasons why focus groups were chosen as the best method to answer the research questions. First, focus groups are a useful method in trying to understand differences between two groups of people (Krueger & Casey, 2008). There were two categories of people in our study: people who participated in the IBC in some form (either by donating money, dumping ice-water on
themselves, or both donating and dumping ice-water) and those who did not participate. Second, Luker (2008) argues that focus groups naturally create “slots” (i.e., participants talk about information that the researcher had not thought about asking) (p. 183). Creating these “slots” helps the conversation within focus groups develop more naturally, and Olausson (2011) argues that this allows for more “elaboration on various, sometimes unforeseen, topics” (p. 283). Third, focus groups help determine factors of motivation (Krueger & Casey, 2008).

**Participants**

The focus group participants were comprised of college students (ages 18-23) attending a midwestern public university. Previous studies have shown college students to be frequent users of social media, often logging in multiple times per day (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Participants were recruited from an introductory public speaking course, as this course is required for students of all majors. Participation in this research study allowed students to fulfill a research participation requirement for their course. There were a total of 73 participants in this study (45 female and 28 male). The ten focus groups were kept homogenous: Four focus groups were formed based upon active participation in the IBC (i.e., dumping ice-water and/or donating money); Six focus groups were formed based upon nonparticipation (i.e., did not dump ice-water and/or donate money). Focus groups ranged from three to thirteen participants and discussions lasted 45 minutes to 1.5 hours long.

**Procedure**

An announcement of the study was posted to the main online course shell for all public speaking courses. The announcement contained a link where participants, after agreeing to a consent form, filled out a demographic survey. This survey data was used to separate people who had some form of participation in the IBC with those who did not participate in the IBC. After
filling out the demographic survey, the participants in this study were sent an email where students were given information on how to sign-up for a focus group.

Semi-structured focus groups were conducted in two different formats. The four focus groups containing participants who had some form of participation in the IBC were conducted face-to-face in a conference room on the university’s campus. The other six focus groups with participants who did not complete any portion of the IBC were conducted virtually through a computer-assisted program. In these virtual focus groups, participants met in a computer lab on campus. The moderator of these virtual focus groups was either present in the room or connected via computer and conference call. The moderator facilitated discussion with questions that appeared on that the participants’ computer screens, and participants responded to these questions with anonymous typed text. The virtual focus groups were conducted this way in order to allow participants to state why they chose not to participate in the IBC in a completely anonymous manner. The hope was that this would allow participants to not hold back any reasons why they chose not to participate in the IBC. Different members of the research team moderated all of the focus groups.

**Analysis**

Once the focus groups were completed, audio recordings were transcribed and compiled for coding. Using the constant comparative approach, the researchers collectively open coded two of the transcripts. Open coding allows for all possible theoretical directions to be explored and is consistent with the exploratory nature of the current study (Charmaz, 2006). This open coding allowed for a tentative codebook to be created. The research team members met three times to discuss the codebook, working together until agreement was reached on these open codes. An illustrative example of one of the open codes used is *cause forgetfulness*, which
described people who had forgotten the true meaning of the IBC (e.g., “There are people even now that did the IBC and have no idea what they did it for”).

After initial open coding was completed, the researchers compiled the open codes and applied a values coding method (Saldana, 2013) to explore the possible connections between the open codes. The values coding method categorized the open codes into three factors: values codes, attitude codes, and belief codes. For example, the open code above, *cause forgetfulness*, was categorized as an attitude code. Saldana (2013) argued that values coding is useful to determine “participant motivation, agency, causation, or ideology” (p. 111). Since this study was interested in participant motivation, values coding was chosen. Once the open codes were categorized into the values codes, the codebook was solidified and the remaining transcripts were coded. To prevent definitional drift and an inconsistency in coding (Gibbs, 2007), coded transcripts were exchanged amongst the researchers and cross-checked for consistency.

The research team, using MAXQDA software, then applied focused coding (Saldana, 2013) to categorize the values codes. For example, the values codes of *unchanged awareness* (defined as “the awareness of ALS through the IBC will not produce lasting change”), *pseudo-fundraising* (defined as “dumping water on oneself gives the illusion that the person donated money”), and *skepticism* (defined as “since so many people were involved in the IBC, the person is skeptical of the validly of the cause”) were focused coded as *futility*. These focused codes were then related to one another through axial coding. For example, the focused codes of *obligation*, *altruism*, *belonging*, and *gaming* were axial coded as *motivations*. Axial coding relates categories and subcategories to each other, giving these categories properties and dimensions (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2013). These focused and axial codes formed the basis for the creation of the model discussed below (see figure 1).
Results

Participants described their experience with the IBC as starting with a nomination on social media from either family or friends. The current study focuses on understanding how these individuals proceeded to act following their nomination. Our results indicate that after being nominated, participants engaged in one of the following behaviors: 1) donation and video sharing, 2) donation only, 3) video sharing only, or 4) nonparticipation (see figure 1).

Participants processed their decision-making mainly through either affective thinking processes (motivated by emotions) or rational thinking processes (motivated by intellectual reasoning).
The motivational factors prompting action included obligation, altruism, belonging, and gaming. The de-motivational factors resulting in inaction included apathy, futility, pragmatism, and attention. These will be described in more depth in the following text.

**Motivating Factors**

*Obligation leads to donating and/or video sharing.* An initial reaction to being nominated was feeling obligated to participate. This typically resulted from affective and/or rational thought processing. In some cases, the nominating party explicitly placed pressure on the participant to participate in the IBC. For instance, one participant explained how his father pushed him to participate: “My dad was just ‘don’t be lame,’ so fine. I caved and just did it.”

Overall, participants who felt obligated to participate, whether as a result of affective or rational thinking processes, generally ended up participating in the IBC either through video sharing and/or donating to ALS. Participants explained how the nomination was important in creating a “heightened awareness” about the IBC, which consequently resulted in feeling the responsibility to participate. As explained by Josh (all names are pseudonyms):

> At first when I saw it… I wasn’t really sure of what it was actually for. But I guess when I actually heard what people were actually donating for it was kind of the turning point for me, because I was nominated and I was like, I should probably actually do this.

After being nominated, many participants rationalized that their participation in the IBC would not be too burdensome, considering the low cost in comparison to other less-important items they typically spend their finances and/or time on. As noted by Abby, “It took like 5 minutes of your day. And like $20.00. Like, we spend $20.00 on anything.” Another interesting aspect behind the obligation to participate was fear of punishment or negative consequences. As outlined by Greg, “many people gave into this, because they felt like there would be
consequences if they did not.” Several others also expressed a fear of undesirable repercussions should they not act upon the nomination.

**Altruism leads to donating and/or video sharing.** A feeling of altruism was a common motivator to participation in the IBC and resulted from *rational* thought processing. These participants strongly believed in the importance of the ALS cause and the need to bring awareness to a cause larger than themselves. Ethan stated, “I think it would be bringing awareness to something. Like doing something together. I think it is really cool. Everybody comes together to accomplish good things.” James agreed by adding, “it brought a lot of different kinds of people together, not even necessarily like as a group of people, but it just like we all work for the same kind of cause.”

For others, their altruism was brought about by a personal connection to the cause. For example, when asked about his experience, Mason shared the following:

*Personally, I did the ice bucket challenge and was partially influenced by my Aunt. It was kinda’ through empathy. She didn't pressure me to do it, but my Aunt suffers from another disease that's not very well known, so I kinda’ put myself in other people's shoes, being like, what if I could find a way to get this disease out there and get support and money raised for it, I'd do the ice bucket challenge in a heartbeat.*

There were also some nonparticipants who expressed a judgmental attitude towards those who had only shared a video and not donated financially to the cause. Charlotte explained her views with the following: “If you donated, then I believe it said you supported the cause…. If you were a person who did the [ice bucket] challenge but didn't donate, I believe it said you were just doing it because everyone else was.” On the other hand, a portion of those who participated for altruistic reasons by sharing a video (but not donating), expressed feelings of regret for not
going a step further. For example, Hannah stated, “I did feel bad that I didn’t donate, but [the ice video] is how I participated.”

**Belonging leads to video sharing.** Some participants claimed their participation in the IBC was a result of membership in an organized group, such as a sorority, staff, or family. Belonging to a group placed indirect pressure on participants to participate so as not to stand out from the norm. Hannah stated that, “they don’t want to be ‘that person’ that didn’t do it.” A feeling of belonging was a common motivator for participation in the IBC through video sharing and most frequently resulted from affective thought processing.

Interestingly, some participants shared stories of participating in the IBC due to bonding with strangers. For example, Brianna claimed she participated due to a connection she made with a roommate who nominated her to participate in the IBC before actually meeting her: “She made that effort to nominate me—it was a reach of friendship or something.” Additionally, some participated due to being inspired by celebrities, such as well-known actors, musicians and athletes, who they admired or identified with. For instance, Riley felt inspired by Charlie Sheen: “He dumped $10,000 cash over his head and said he was donating it to ALS and encouraged other celebs to do so. It was kinda neat.”

**Gaming leads to video sharing.** The competitive and entertaining nature of making ice-dumping videos was important in motivating participants to participate in the IBC. David explains this point of view: “It was fun. It's exciting to get challenged and challenge your friends back.” Participants who participated in the IBC for these reasons decided to video share only and were motivated by affective thought processing.

These participants also strived to make a video stand out from their peers. For instance, Jim described the IBC as “a competition to see who had the most creative way to dump water
“ATTENTION WHORES” AND “OTHER PEOPLE’S SHOES”

over themselves.” Gabriel described a video made by one of his friends, who took great efforts to create a unique video for the IBC:

He bought a thong speedo thing, put it on, he shaved one cheek and not the other. It was bad. He had his friends with water guns surround him. He had ice buckets attached to a tree. And then he had ice cubes pegged at him. Like pegged. He had marks all over him. And that was his challenge.

Other participants saw the IBC as an opportunity to discover their composure or physical strength. “You kind of just want to see how your reaction is to it. You know, will you freak out as much as they did?” Some participants, however, thought that doing that IBC for enjoyment was not to be condoned. Emily explained this perspective by stating, “they just did it because it was 'fun' and everyone else was doing it. A lot didn't actually care about the real point of the challenge.”

Although the motivating factors lead to participation in the IBC, some participants still did not participate because it was not convenient (see ease on model). For example, Cody stated, “I was busy the next day and didn’t want to get wet and so I passed the 24 hour mark and after that I felt like there was no point.” These nonparticipants originally were motivated to participate in the IBC, but constraints (e.g., time) led them to do nothing.

De-Motivating Factors

Apathy leads to nonparticipation. Some respondents had an apathetic response to the IBC. This appeared to be the result of rational thought processing and frequently resulted in non-participation. For example, Brian said he felt a lack of interest in participating because the IBC seemed to be only “some kind of internet stunt.” Some took their beliefs a step further, taking to social media to make a public stance against the cause: “I would post about how wrong the
challenge was set up and how it wasn't really accomplishing a goal of which it should have had.” Others, such as Levi, decided to talk to their friends in person about their aversion to the IBC: “When I saw my friends in person I talked about how stupid it was and how corrupt the organization is.” Additionally, some made explicitly negative comparisons to previous social media fundraisers, which had not had positive outcomes as a reason for not participating in the IBC.

**Futility leads to nonparticipation.** Some participants claimed they had not engaged in the IBC because of their belief in its futility or because they were overwhelmed with the large number of fundraisers that have now become common on social media. Zach shared a popular sentiment with, “If I had to donate to every ‘challenge’ I'd be digging in garbage cans at night.” One of the strongest de-motivators was also nonparticipants’ skepticism of the IBC as a credible fundraiser. Andrew stated, “I think part of the problem with some of the fundraising posts is a lot of them are…not real fundraisers.” In some cases, nonparticipants articulated their mistrust of the ALS organization, such as those who expressed that “it was clear that they were in the business of making money, not helping people.” Steven also was suspicious of the ALS organization, saying “I would have a better chance to [participate] if I knew that they were going to use 100% of the money towards ALS.”

**Pragmatism leads to donating or nonparticipation.** Participants sometimes thought of the IBC challenge in terms of how pragmatic it would be to participate. This was the result of rational thought processing and resulted in either participation or nonparticipation. Among those who participated, the ease of participation was often mentioned as the overriding factor behind their decision. Aaron explained, “it was easy to do and pretty much anyone could do it.” On the other end of the spectrum, non-participants believed that the use of water for the purposes of
video sharing was impractical and wasteful. Some emphasized that the IBC took “clean water for granted” and that “countries around the world walk miles for semi-clean water and we Americans over here decide it'll be fun to dump millions of gallons of clean water on our heads for 'awareness'.” As an alternative, these participants donated to the cause instead of sharing a video.

Attention leads to donating or nonparticipation. One of the main reasons participants did not participate in the IBC was due to fear of being perceived as attention seekers. These respondents described their friends’ annoying attempts to out-perform others in IBC videos and “just try to get ‘likes’.” Megan explained, “a lot of people at my work were begging people to nominate them. They’re begging to get attention.” Sarah’s attitude was similar: “I was nominated but did not participate because I thought it was dumb that people were not donating money. They just wanted attention.” Some nonparticipants used terms such as “attention hogs” and “attention whores” when describing IBC participants.

Participants decided to donate “quietly” as an alternative way of participating in the IBC. Robby explains, “I don't care about the attention. I think that if you're going to donate, then donate. Why make a fuss about it on social media?” This was a pattern of behavior connecting rational thought processing to donating to ALS through modified altruism, the need to make a difference, which came from a source of logic and not emotion.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the motivational factors and processes people went through before participating in the social media campaign of the IBC. There are several implications that can be discussed from the emergent results of this study. First, there were two main routes, affective and rational, that heavily influenced whether people participated
or did not participate in the IBC. These two routes mirror the central and peripheral routes of ELM. Second, the motivating and de-motivating factors that led to participation or nonparticipation will be discussed in their connections to previous social media activism literature. Finally, some practical implications are discussed, including how this study is useful for future social media campaigns.

Connections to ELM

Central to the findings of this study were the two initial paths of participation that people took. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argued that when people do not take much time to think about a particular issue, the peripheral route is used. This was consistent with the findings of this study. The people in the current study were nominated and then chose whether to participate or not participate in the IBC. Thus, after being nominated, people had to think about whether they should or should not participate. Those that took the affective route did not give much thought to the futility or pragmatic aspects of the IBC. Instead, these people were more drawn to emotional appeals, such as belonging to a group. Petty, Heesacker, and Hughes (1997) argue that in the peripheral route “cues in the persuasion context either elicit an affective state (such as happiness) . . . or trigger a relatively simple inference or heuristic that a person can use to judge the validity of the message” (p. 109). Petty et al. (1997) give an example of being a person who agrees with a school psychologist, simply because the psychologist is viewed as the person who has the correct information. The person who agrees with the psychologist does not evaluate whether what the psychologist said was accurate; the person agrees with the psychologist based upon the psychologist’s title. Relating this to the IBC, the celebrities who participated in the IBC often influenced participants in the current study who followed the affective route. Thus, since celebrities participated in the IBC, participants saw the challenge as good. Other people besides
celebrities, such as family members and close friends, also influenced people in the affective route. The affective route did not require much elaborate thought about the IBC. Everyone, including influential people, took the IBC, thus making the IBC a noble endeavor.

Contrary to the affective route, participants who took the rational route gave much more thought to the usefulness of the IBC. This is very similar to the cognitive route of persuasion. Consider what Petty et al. (1997) argue: “Under the central route, the target of the influence attempt is thinking about the message and actively generating favorable and/or unfavorable thoughts in response to it” (p. 109). In the rational route, participants gave thought to the IBC, specifically the extent of favorable outcomes. Participants in the rational route saw the negative outcomes of the IBC, as is evident in the de-motivating factors. These participants were skeptical of the success of the IBC, struggling to determine what “success” was. The favorable aspects of the IBC, such as the motivation of altruism, were balanced against unfavorable motivations, such as apathy. Thus, participants in the rational route gave thought to the IBC by trying to “determine the merits of the arguments” (Cacioppo, Petty, & Stoltenbegr, 1985).

Both rational participants and affective participants were found to participate and not to participate in the IBC. Those in the rational route, however, were more likely to select a de-motivating factor; those in the affective route were more likely to select a motivating factor. As a result, participants who stepped back and evaluated the positive and negative aspects of the IBC were more prone to not participate in the IBC than those that processed the IBC through an affective process. Participants in the rational route were more skeptical of the IBC than those of the affective route. When examining skepticism in online reviews, Sher and Lee (2009) found that “customers with low skepticism tend to adopt the peripheral route in forming attitude” (p. 137). This finding by Sher and Lee is also found in the participants of the IBC. Participants of
the *rational* route were skeptical of the success and positive impact of the IBC; therefore, while participation or nonparticipation in the IBC came from both *rational* and *affective* participants, nonparticipation favored the *rational* route and participation favored the *affective* route.

**Motivating and De-motivating Factors and Social Media Activism**

As is evident from the results, people were motivated or de-motivated to engage in the IBC for a variety of reasons. Previous research has not focused on the motivations of social media activism, but instead has focused on the benefits or drawback of social media activism. After assessing the results of this study, it is evident that the motivating and de-motivating factors are guided by how people view social media activism.

The physical engagement in the IBC was guided by motivations of *obligation* and *gaming*. Two of the reasons people were motivated to participate in the IBC include a desire to belong and because they perceived the IBC as a game. One of the benefits of social media activism is that this type of activism can lead to physical participation in the campaign (Kang, 2012). The IBC was set up in a manner that, in order to belong, physical participation was needed. There are many examples that can be viewed from popular news sources of many people choosing to participate in the IBC. One of the most notable physical demonstrations of the IBC was Paul Bissonnette, who used a helicopter to dump glacier water on himself (Wyshynski, 2014). This example is consistent with *belonging* and *gaming* as motivational factors.

Research (e.g., Briones et al., 2013) has also shown that another benefit of social media activism is that it creates awareness. Nonparticipants of the IBC, however, question whether awareness was a good thing. One of the main de-motivating factors was *attention*, where nonparticipants thought that people only participated to gain attention for themselves. Thus, while the campaign was promoting and creating awareness around ALS, it also was creating
attention for people. Nonparticipants saw this as a distraction and were not motivated to participate. This means that research examining how social media activism is good for creating awareness (e.g., see Bennett, 2010; Esien-Ziya, 2013) needs to also realize that the creation of awareness paradoxically creates skeptical feelings about attention. Accordingly, a benefit of social media activism is awareness, but this benefit allowed for the de-motivating factor of attention in IBC participants.

The de-motivating factor of futility connects to a drawback of social media activism. Harlow & Guo (2014) and McCafferty (2011) argue that social media activism may not create change that lasts. Participants of the IBC were de-motivated, perceiving the IBC as ephemeral and short-lived. Participants argued that after a while people will have forgotten about the IBC, or at least forgotten that the IBC was about helping ALS victims. Nonparticipants of the IBC saw the campaign as futile and were not motivated to participate. Because social media activism is not viewed as a long-term solution, this type of activism turns off some people.

A person who is motivated to participate might not participate, and a person who is de-motivated to participate might participate. For example, Lim (2013) pointed out that social media campaigns work if they are “simple” and “low risk” (p. 650). As is evident in the model, one could be motivated to participate in the IBC, but ultimately not participate because they saw the challenge as too difficult. This means that a person might be motivated by altruism, but not participate in the cause. Similarly, the de-motivating factors of pragmatism and attention result in participation through modified altruism illustrating that motivations and de-motivations do not ultimately determine participation or nonparticipation in a social media cause.
Practical Implications

There are three main practical implications that can be gathered from this study. One of the first implications for social media campaigns is that the campaigns would benefit from emphasizing affective routes. This means that the campaign should prioritize emotional appeals. One way to accomplish this is by focusing on the motivating factors that affective participants took in the current study. The emotional appeals of obligation, belongingness, and gaming will help create more affective routes toward participation.

Second, the campaign needs to balance the line of ease. Participants who were on the path to participate in the IBC would ultimately move back to nonparticipation if they found the IBC too difficult to complete. Some did not donate money because the procedure to donate money was not clear. Making a campaign easy, yet not too easy, however, is a fine line to walk. Some will think that a campaign that is too easy does not require sacrifice (see Harlow & Gou, 2014, Newnham & Bell, 2012), and therefore is not worth participating in. Others will find that the campaign is too difficult, and thus not participate. Future social media campaigns should be difficult enough to produce sacrifice, but easy enough for all to participate. For example, in the IBC, the donation part of the campaign could have been made easier. When people nominated another person, they could have included a link to donate. Thus, the campaign would have an element of sacrifice (dumping ice-water on one’s head) while also being easy (it is clear how to make a donation).

Third, campaigns should focus on motivations that lead to participation while avoiding certain de-motivating factors. For example, campaigns need to emphasize motivations of obligation and altruism, as these generate the most participation. These two motivating factors were the only routes that engaged in each level of participation (both ice and water, donating
only, or ice only). Additionally, campaigns that are affective in nature should avoid the negative implications of attention, as this was the only de-motivating factor taken from the affective route. Accordingly, if the campaign is affectively driven, the campaign should make sure that people are not participating in the campaign solely to gain attention.

Future campaigns could use the model developed to focus the campaign on specific motivations. For example, the IBC was seen as gaming, where people could have fun and be creative in their participation. Future designs of campaigns could be set up in a similar manner, where participating in the campaign also allows for creative expression. Additionally, the IBC successfully made people feel obligated to participate because they were nominated. Thus, future campaigns would benefit from the nomination aspect, compelling others to participate in the campaign who otherwise would not have.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

There are a few limitations that the current study encountered. First, although the focus groups for participants who did not participate in the IBC were set up through a computer-program in order for responses to be anonymous, there were no face-to-face focus groups conducted for these participants. A mixture of how the focus groups were conducted might have been useful to when analyzing responses. Second, the age group selected for this study could be a limitation. Although college students are active users of social media, their perceptions of the IBC might be different than people of an older age group.

Future research could benefit from the limitation of age in the current study. Future studies could interview more participants (and nonparticipants) of social media campaigns from diverse age groups. This would allow for a more complete picture of the phenomenon of motivations in social media campaigns.
Future research should also continue exploring the motivations behind social media activism that are not focused on politics and protests, and instead begin focusing on social media activism related to health and concerns of well-being. Through analysis of various forms of social media activism, a more nuanced and developed understanding of social media activism will be better understood.

**Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that participants go through different processes before deciding to participate or not participate in the social media activism of the IBC. The processes participants go through are quite complex and layered, and decisions about participating or not participating in the IBC are influenced by multiple motivating and de-motivating factors. As social media activism continues to grow, communication scholars should be increasingly interested in understanding these processes of motivation and de-motivation. This study is useful for understanding the phenomenon of social media activism, a phenomenon that is not going away anytime soon.
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“ATTENTION WHORES” AND “OTHER PEOPLE’S SHOES” 33


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