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# Political Efficacy, Social Network and Involvement in Public

## Deliberation in Rural China

### Abstract

This study examines the role of political efficacy and social networks in rural China to understand the social characteristics that might affect an individual's disposition to join in public deliberations. A model is developed and empirically tested by Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis. This shows active involvement in public deliberation to be positively influenced by political efficacy (with *external* political efficacy being a *partial mediator*), high internal or external political efficacy, and a high *internal* efficacy leading to high *external* political efficacy. Social networks have a moderating effect, individuals with a high social network status having an *enhanced* positive *internal* political efficacy-public deliberation involvement but *weakened* positive *external* political efficacy-public deliberation involvement. The research advances the theoretical understanding of complex political psycho-behavior relationships and provided insights into the role of social settings. The findings could also help boost deliberative democracy in such limited democratic societies as China.

### Keywords

Political efficacy; Public deliberation; Social networks; Rural China

## 1 Introduction

One imperative of contemporary society is the need for people to have some say in authoritative decisions that affect their lives (Roberts (2004). For the *deliberative democracy movement*, for example, this necessitates that, for a democratic decision to be legitimate, it must be preceded by authentic deliberation and not merely the aggregation of preferences that typically occurs in voting (e.g., Cohen, 1997). All deliberative theories share a similar view on the process of public deliberation preceding collective decision making (Grönlund, Setälä, & Herne, 2010; Setälä, Grönlund, & Herne, 2010). The concept of *public deliberation* emerges from democratic deliberative theory (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Chambers, 2003). There is an increasing recognition of the benefit of involving citizens in public deliberation, essentially to increase the sense of democratic legitimacy and ease the implementation of public policy (Carpini et al., 2004; Mendelberg, 2002; Solomon & Abelson, 2012). However, some skeptics doubt that deliberative democracy is a

practically viable theory, arguing that it is difficult to find ways to harness deliberation effectively, with some citizen involvement initiatives resulting in unintended negative outcomes (Baekkeskov & Öberg, 2016; Hartz Karp, Anderson, Gasti, & Felicetti, 2010; Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, & Sokhey, 2010). We believe that the difficulty will be easier to be overcome when we know “who deliberates” (Cook, Carpini, & Jacobs, 2007), because the most basic facet of effective public deliberation in need of further study is the degree to which some citizens speak out and others do not (Chalmers, 2015).

Thus, the present study attempts to help further understand the factors addressing “who deliberates?” Using *social force theory* as a theoretical framework, this study extends previous research on the individual determinants of public deliberation involvement by simultaneously considering individual psychological and social features to explore the effects of political efficacy and social status. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of political efficacies on public deliberation and to examine the social network status that conditions the effects of political psychology on public deliberation. Deliberative and consultative institutions in China have developed even faster than competitive electoral institutions at the township level and beyond (He & Warren, 2011). Public deliberation has the potential to lead to wider democratization in China, in which case public participation in rural China can provide not only vivid examples of Chinese democracy but also empirical experience of Chinese political reform (He & Warren, 2011). Analyzing original survey data from rural China, this article explored how individuals’ psychological and social features affecting their public deliberation involvement in China, which is expected to help further understand and boost deliberative democracy in such less fully democratic societies as China.

## 2 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Public deliberation is generally seen as a public discussion and debate about sociopolitical topics that should include (or represent) everyone affected by an issue, offer equal opportunities to participate (Baek, Wojcieszak, & Carpini, 2012) and aims at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information and claims made by fellow participants (Baek et al., 2012; Chambers, 2003; Fishkin, He, Luskin, & Siu, 2010). Public deliberation is therefore widely accepted as a form of informal and discursive public participation, without the need to reach a consensus, its participants expected to pursue their own interests and ideally characterized as having a dominant interest in the legitimacy of the results (Carpini et al., 2004). In China, public deliberation was designed to mobilize citizens to deal with similar public issues faced by Western societies - providing a useful means of dealing with ‘complex issues in a complex society’ (He & Warren, 2011). Although the prospects for a deliberative democracy may seem slim in such limited democratic societies as China (Fishkin et al., 2010), efforts towards public deliberation have increased markedly in recent years. In rural

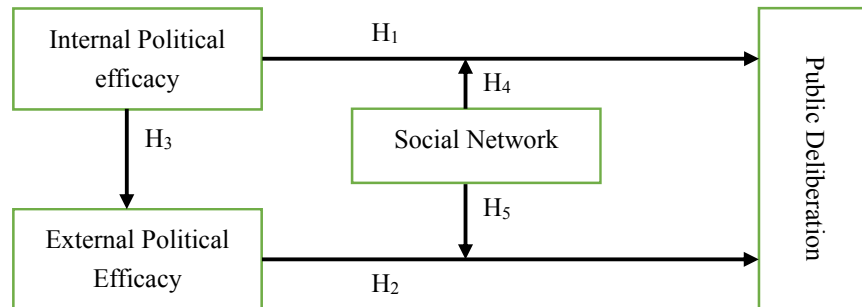
China, deliberative politics have emerged alongside such empowerments as village elections and village representative assemblies, and public deliberation has become common for villages since the mid to late 1990s. It is possible that an improved understanding of public deliberation in rural China could help boost deliberative democracy in such less fully democratic countries as China.

Many researchers emphasize the effects of individual political psychology (Grönlund et al., 2010; Komporozos-Athanasidou & Thompson, 2015). In particular, it is argued that the political efficacy of an individual is perceived by both being present at public deliberations and the extent of contribution. Some studies explore the variation in the individual factors reputedly influencing self-reported public deliberation, such as knowledge, education and personal opinions (Dutwin, 2003); while others analyze the engagement opportunities provided by different races, classes and institutional structures (Hess & Leal, 2001). Although the small group social characteristic literature provides several other insights into public deliberation (Carpini et al., 2004; Mendelberg, 2002), we argue that the current emphasis of most public deliberation literature has led to the neglect of important social aspects of interpersonal relationships that need to be considered more carefully when one encounters others in political deliberation (Dutwin, 2003). Therefore, individuals should not be studied in isolation; rather we should pay attention to the social forces potentially operating on them (Anderson, 2010).

Social forces - where and with whom we live, work and socialize - play a crucial role in influencing many of our decisions, including political attitudes and involvement (Anderson, 2010). A number of different lines of research assert that the individuals in our social environment have an effect on individual political opinion and behavior (Klofstad, 2009). Studies in social capital theory have demonstrated the potential importance of social contexts on political behavior and attitudes. For example, R. S. Burt (1997), Putnam (1995) and Nannicini, Stella, Tabellini, and Troiano (2013) found that social relationships offers an array of resources that can be beneficial both individually and collectively (Anderson, 2010). A number of studies in social interaction theory find that various types of social interactions, such as group memberships, enhance participation (Boehmke & Bowen, 2012; McClain, Johnson Carew, Walton Jr, & Watts, 2009), community integration (Huckfeldt, Plutzer, & Sprague, 1993; Xu, Perkins, & Chow, 2010) and recreational interaction (Ikeda, Kobayashi, & Richey, 2012). They argue that social interaction creates opportunities for individuals to gather political information that allows them to live beyond personal resource constraints (McClurg, 2003). The studies of social context suggest that the social environment is likely to influence all types of political attitudes and participation (Leighley, 1990). Therefore, there is good reason to believe that the impact of political efficacy on participation is also context-dependent (F. L. F. Lee, 2006).

Thus, we attempt to integrate individual psychological and social features to explore the effects of political efficacy and social status on public deliberation involvement. Specifically, we consider political efficacy, conceptualized as internal efficacy and external efficacy (Acock & Clarke, 1990; Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990), as a variable influencing public deliberation involvement, and social networks as a

variable moderating the effects of political efficacy. We develop a structural model to explore the effects of political efficacy, in which internal and external efficacy have direct effects on public deliberation involvement, and the mediating role of external efficacy on the effect of internal efficacy. Further, we explore the moderating role of social networks - the prevalence and density of kinship, friendship and acquaintanceship networks - on the effects of political efficacy. The theoretical framework is depicted in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.**  
Theoretical Framework

## 2.2 Political Efficacy and Public Deliberation Involvement

Political efficacy has been considered one of the most important psychological constructs closely related to political participation (F. L. F. Lee, 2006; Osborne, Yogeewaran, & Sibley, 2015). Referring to personal confidence in one's own political acumen and faith in the system's responsiveness to competent strategic action (A. Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Gastil & Xenos, 2010), both external and internal political efficacy is of importance when studying different aspects of political behavior (A. Campbell et al., 1954; Karlsson & Sohl, 2010). A well-confirmed finding of studies is that both the belief in one's personal skills for political participation and the belief that one's actions and opinions are heard are important clues and factors to consider when investigating and explaining political behaviors and associated phenomena (Almond & Verba, 1963; Becker, 2004; Chan & Guo, 2013; Karlsson & Sohl, 2010). Feelings of political efficacy have often been found to stimulate individuals to become involved in such political activities as public deliberation (Jacobs, Cook, & Carpini, 2009). Therefore, it is easy to infer that both internal and external efficacies may play important roles in public deliberation involvement. However, external and internal political efficacies are not the same concept since they do not measure, or actually refer to, the same political resources and thus do not behave in the same way towards other as important measures and concepts concerning political resources and attitudes (Karlsson & Sohl, 2010). Therefore, what is of concern is whether both internal and external efficacy share the same orientation to the same political participation, i.e. public deliberation in this study.

Defined as the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process, i.e., that it is worthwhile to perform one's civic duties (A. Campbell et al., 1954), political efficacy consists of two related, but distinguishable, concepts. These comprise (1) *internal* political efficacy, which refers to a person's feelings of their own personal competence to participate in politics, and (2) *external* political efficacy, which refers to a person's perception of the responsiveness of the political system to their demands (Lane, 1962; Morrell, 2005). Hayes and Bean (1993)'s cross-national studies have shown that the concepts of external and internal political efficacy are not interchangeable, as they correspond to different dimensions of political activity. Gastil and Xenos (2010)'s work suggests that complex and varied relationships exist between attitudes and behaviors in both civic and political life. Although the causal relationship between internal and external efficacy is unclear, studies indicate that internal and external political efficacy are positively correlated (Aish & Jöreskog, 1990), with internal efficacy generally perceived as predicting external efficacy (Hayes & Bean, 1993) and that internal efficacy beliefs are a pre-condition for external control beliefs (Craig et al., 1990). That is, individuals do not develop a sense of personal competency unless they believe in the general feasibility of their being able to influence politics (Miller, 1970).

Therefore, although both internal and external efficacy may play a role in political participation, some argue that external efficacy is likely to be empirically more useful in the sense that it captures the ultimate effect of one's choice on political outcomes (Hayes & Bean, 1993). External efficacy constitutes perceptions of institutional and other individual behavior (Gastil & Xenos, 2010). Finkel (1985) has found that confidence in system responsiveness is less stable than confidence in one's own ability to act politically, because external efficacy is more likely to be influenced by experiences with public participation than internal efficacy. Self-confidence and confidence in one's own personal competence certainly enhance action; however, even with a high sense of internal efficacy, action is unlikely to be taken if individuals have low outcome expectancies (Bandura, 1986). Beliefs are generally related to own experiences with political participation, or perceptions of the experiences of others with political participation. Public deliberation could have the potential to serve as a model for the individual's perception of the usefulness of political action, and the development of feelings of external efficacy might influence internal confidence with regard to political competence, and have effects on later political participation and deliberation involvement. If the political process could be rendered more rational and responsive in individuals' eyes, confidence in the political system and government officials would be boosted and individuals would be more inclined to robust engagement (Neblo et al., 2010), and judgments about one's own abilities to act are related to expectations about the outcomes of these actions.

Thus, we get first 3 hypotheses of this study:

*H1:* Internal political efficacy has a direct positive effect on public deliberation involvement

*H2:* External political efficacy has a direct positive effect on public deliberation involvement.

*H3:* Internal political efficacy has an indirect positive effect on public deliberation involvement, with external political efficacy as a mediating factor.

### 2.3 Social Networks, Political Efficacy and Public Deliberation Involvement

Composed mainly of close family members, relatives and friends, social networks provide a ubiquitous social background, where social interactions happen and social force becomes influential. Social network analysis provides extensive insights into the social factors that facilitate or constrain the flow of information and other resources between and within social groups. Political scientists have increasingly looked to social networks to explain who participates (D. E. Campbell, 2013; Valenzuela, Kim, & de Zúñiga, 2012). Although their studies have produced mixed results, social networks provide a useful framework for uncovering the underlying mechanisms through which individual political psychology influences individual political attitudes and behaviors. In China, social networks are useful not only for economic pursuits, but also in the realm of politics, whose potent forms are often associated with state power (Su & Feng, 2013). Some even believe that an individual's social networks rival the importance of many other factors, such as class position, political power and professional skills, in influencing personal development, being deemed a form of crucial "social resources" in status attainment (Lin, 1999).

It has been argued that the effect of social network information and accessing or mobilizing social resources may be contingent on the original status (Lin, 1999). An individual with high centrality within the network, in the sense of being recognized widely by others as having a close relationship, may have a higher network status. Individuals who link others that are disconnected and who bridge structural holes, exercise control over information flows (Freeman, 1979) and enjoy special advantages in social and economic exchanges (R. Burt, 1982); consequently, they have a higher social network status (Faris & Felmlee, 2011). An individual taking a central position implies that he or she manages a greater number of ties with others. This provides better and more opportunities to access others who are willing to exchange social support. Consequently, it is likely that the individual feels a greater sense of significance, attachment to others, sense of belonging (J. Lee & Kim, 2011; Morrison, 2002) and self-efficacy, all of which are the antecedents of engagement in political participation. Moreover, individuals centrally positioned in a network enjoy more alternative paths to reach others, which can enhance individuals' autonomic competence and lead them to be more confident in their self-control and social autonomy – positively influencing collective action. In China, Su and Feng (2013) find those who enjoy more intensive and stronger social networks are more likely to voice their views. Individuals who enjoy better social connections reflect a sense of efficacy and are consequently more likely to be willing to participate in collective action (Su & Feng, 2013).

Higher status in social networks usually carries connotations of being better, superior, more successful and more able. With higher status, it is easier to feel a sense of pride, dignity and self-confidence (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2009). Social capital research has focused on how social interactions in formal and informal networks provide personal benefits as well as the development of civic values and societal

engagement (Putnam, 1995). Studies have found that individuals more embedded in community networks foster more civic skills (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), encourage a civic spirit and volunteerism (Putnam, 1995) and a sense of political efficacy (Berry, Portney, & Thomson, 1993), as well as generalized trust and other civic attitudes (Putnam, 1995). Discussions with friends who are interested or active in politics can help people learn the reasons for participating while reinforcing the idea that such behavior is desirable among one's peers (McClurg, 2003). The prevalence and density of kinship, friendship and acquaintanceship networks, and the level of participation in community based organizations, foster the emergence of collective efficacy, or solidarity and mutual trust (social cohesion) among community residents, combined with shared expectations for social control-related action (Browning, Dietz, & Feinberg, 2004). Studies of social capital and interpersonal cooperation (Putnam, 1995; Xu et al., 2010) illustrate that interacting with fellow citizens causes individuals to have a greater affective attachment to their community, which subsequently leads to more frequent participation in civic activities. Highly interactive communal behavior can have a mutually reinforcing relationship with a sense of one's own, and other community members', civic responsibilities (Gastil & Xenos, 2010), which may be the antecedents' of political participation. Furthermore, as Isaacs (1975) indicates, group identity is consistent with an individual's value or belief system, which produces feelings of enthusiasm, pride, hope, elation, excitement and happiness, all of which imply high political efficacy and, in turn, political participation.

Thus, we get 2 more hypotheses of this study:

- H4*: Social network status moderates the relationship stipulated in *H1*, such that the relationship between public deliberation involvement and external political efficacy is stronger for those with higher social network status
- H5*: Social network status moderates the relationship stipulated in *H2*, such that the relationship between public deliberation involvement and internal political efficacy is stronger for those with higher social network status.

### 3 Data and Measures

#### 3.1 Research Data

Public deliberation in China is understood to serve as a tool to improve administrative efficiency, expand participation and narrow contestation (Collins & Chan, 2009; He, 2011), and it has become widespread and exhibited a variety of forms in rural China (He & Warren, 2011). The data used to test the hypotheses are original survey data collected in a village in the northern Zhejiang Province in the summer of 2014. The village is located in Zeguo Town where meetings have been held for villagers to deliberate village affairs with village or township officials since 1990s. These deliberative meetings are believed to be an innovation probably encouraged by the imperatives of elections, re-elections and approval voting (Tan, 2006), and are praised and propagated for their successful embodiment of civil participation and democratic progress. The population in the village is 1762 with more than 600 households. We



surveyed only one member of each household, because other members might have identical social networks and it is better to take the household as a whole when studying political and social participation. Respondents who might be illiterate were helped to complete the questionnaires. The final data set comprises 576 observations, with 51.7 percent male respondents and 48.3 percent female and with ages ranging from 26 to 78 ( $M=48.76$ ,  $SD=13.1$ ).

## 3.2 Research Questionnaire and Approach

### 3.2.1 Public Deliberation

To investigate the overall deliberative activities, existing studies (Carpini et al., 2004; He & Warren, 2011) were followed by including various deliberative participation activities into a variable assumed to be present during informal public discussions or formal issues forum/meeting with a format allowing structured interaction between participants. The set of questionnaires consists of three items that measure formal and informal public deliberations. For each question, the respondents were asked the frequencies or possibilities of being involved in either kind of public deliberation. Thus, we asked, “How often are you invited to villagers’ meetings to discuss village issues?”, “How often do you discuss village public affairs with your friends or neighbors?” and “How often do you participate in the deliberative meetings of the villagers?” The questions were scored on 5-point Likert scale with endpoints 1 (never at all) and 5 (every time when necessary). Table 1 gives the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), loading and residual scores for each of the three questions.

### 3.2.2 Political Efficacy

Previous measures of political efficacy (Acock & Clarke, 1990; Becker, 2004; A. Campbell et al., 1954; Karp & Banducci, 2008; Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Halperin, 2013) are integrated and modified in the context of rural China into two pairs of three items that gauge internal and external efficacy. For *external* political efficacy, respondents were asked to evaluate the truth of the statements, “In general, our village and township cadres care what people like me think”, “In general, our village commission and township government take suggestion from people like me very seriously” and “Our leader and our nation always consider our feelings when decisions are made.” For *internal* political efficacy, the equivalent items are “People like me are very well informed of village public affairs”, “People like me know the procedures and mechanism of our self-government system” and “People like me understand the politics and politician well.” The statements were also scored on a 5-point Likert scale with endpoints 1 (not true at all) and 5 (completely true). The summary statistics are provided in Table 1.

### 3.2.3 Social Network Status

The name generator approach was used to collect information regarding the respondents' social network status. Many researchers agree that centrality is an important structural attribute of social networks – being equivalent to power, where an individual's status is a function of the statuses of those to whom he or she is connected (Bonacich, 1987; Faris & Felmlee, 2011) - and closely related to other important group properties and processes (Freeman, 1979; J. Lee & Kim, 2011). (Bonacich, 1987; Faris & Felmlee, 2011). Therefore, network centrality is considered an indicator of social network status in this study. The simplest measure of network centrality is the number of nominations a person receives (in-degree) or makes (out-degree). Respondents were asked to list up to five people in the village who they considered their best friends. Those with more connections or ties tend to be more central to the network (Marcum, 2011). Following most previous studies (Bonacich, 1987; Okamoto et al., 2011), the measure of network centrality used is in-degree. The summary statistics are again reported in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Mean (M), standard deviations (SD), loading, residual of the variables (N= 576)

Construct	Indicator	Mean	St dev	Loading	Residual	Weight
Internal efficacy	INT1	1.981	.973	.363	.869	.161
	INT2	1.986	.996	.737	.457	.406
	INT3	2.333	.857	.898	.195	.713
External efficacy	EXT1	2.469	.833	.964	.071	.499
	EXT2	2.490	1.035	.812	.341	.348
	EXT3	2.158	1.025	.769	.409	.307
public deliberation	PUB1	2.717	1.111	.933	.130	.407
	PUB2	2.755	1.091	.925	.144	.390
	PUB3	1.982	.800	.723	.477	.359
Social networks	SOC	5.000	4.727	1.000000	.000	1.000

### 3.2.4 Assessment of Common Method Variance

All studied variables were measured from a single source of respondents, and therefore the data may be susceptible to common method variance. A range of procedures is used to minimize this problem. First, the very beginning of the questionnaire introduction indicated that there were no good or bad answers and that the sole interest is in the actual perceptions of respondents. Second, based on previously validated scales, the items in the questionnaire are formulated as concisely, clearly and specifically as possible. Third, and most important statistically, the existence of common method variance can be tested using Harman's one-factor test (Setälä et al., 2010). A principal

component factor analysis of the dependent and independent variables yields more than 1 factor with eigenvalue higher than 1.0, with the first factor explaining only 46 percent - less than 50 percent - of the total variance, which suggests the absence of one major factor and indicates the existence of common method variance in the data.

## 4 Data Analysis and Results

Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used to investigate the hypotheses. Because PLS-SEM is not constrained with identification and other technical requirements, it is useful to test complex models with many different constructs and indicators (Nitzl, 2016). As a distribution-independent method, PLS has fewer constraints and statistical conditions than covariance-based techniques (Setälä et al., 2010). In particular, it makes minimal demands with respect to measurement scales, sample size and residual distributions (Valentino, Gregorowicz, & Groenendyk, 2009). More important, PLS-SEM is more appropriate than maximum likelihood approaches when the goal of the research is exploratory or theory building predication rather than model fit (Neblo et al., 2010; Roberts, 2004), because it is useful when “prediction” is an important part of the research question, whereas alternative methods such as CB-SEM are unsuitable for prediction because of the indeterminacy problem (Hair & Sarstedt, 2011; Nitzl, 2016). Thus, it is increasingly recommended to test and validate exploratory models in the early stages of theoretical development. PLS-SEM allows for an easier integration of formative construct measurements into an SEM (Nitzl, 2016). As the aim is to predict individual public deliberation involvement based on the latent constructs of political efficacy and social status, the PLS approach is well suited for this analysis.

Smart PLS 2.0 was applied to test the research model with the path weighting scheme. The first step is a confirmatory factor analysis to measurement validity (see appendix for the detail). Each latent variable's AVE (Average Variance Extracted) is evaluated to check convergent validity. It is found that all of AVE values are greater than the acceptable threshold of 0.5, so convergent validity is confirmed. A table (Table 2) is created to check establish discriminant validity. In the table, the square root of AVE in each latent variable was calculated and written in bold on the diagonal of the table. The correlations between the latent variables are placed in the lower left triangle of the table. The square root of AVE is larger than other correlation values among the latent variables, which indicates that discriminant validity is well established. Additional checks to assess the threat of multicollinearity include the variance inflation factor (VIF) when all these predictors are incorporated into the models. All VIFs are below 5.0 when all predictors are entered, and tolerance is over .2, which indicates that multi-collinearity is unlikely to be a significant issue affecting the validity of the results. The second step is a procedure called bootstrapping to test both the inner and outer model. In this procedure, Subsamples are taken from the original sample to get bootstrap standard errors, which in turn calculate T-values to test significance of the structural model. Bootstrapping results are reported in Table 3.

**Table 2**

AVE, composite reliabilities (CR), Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and inter-correlations of variables (N= 576)

	AVE	C.R.	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Internal efficacy	External efficacy	public deliberation	Social networks
Internal efficacy	.678	.863	.792	<b>.823</b>			
External efficacy	.762	.887	.791	.818	<b>.873</b>		
public deliberation	.746	.898	.834	.706	.715	<b>.864</b>	
Social networks	1.000	1.000	1.000	.798	.908	.764	<b>1.000</b>

Diagonal numerals (bold-typed) represent the square root of the average variance extracted. The lower-left triangle elements are the correlations

Table 3 shows that internal political efficacy has a significantly positive effect on public deliberation involvement with a path coefficient of 0.726 ( $t=40.157$ ), which supports *H1*; and external political efficacy has a significantly positive effect on public deliberation involvement with a path coefficient of 0.701 ( $t=40.536$ ), which supports *H2*. Smart PLS bootstrapping procedures are also used to analyze the mediating effect of external political efficacy between internal political efficacy and public deliberation. With this method, the indirect effect has to be significant to establish the mediating effect. Here, the significance of the indirect effects is analyzed formally in both the absence and presence of the intervening variable. Table 3 summarizes the path coefficients from the partial least squares analysis: (a) the predictor (internal political efficacy) has a significant positive influence on the mediating variable (external political efficacy) with a path coefficient of 0.816 ( $t=67.778$ ); (b) the predictor (internal political efficacy) has a significant influence on the predicated variable (public deliberation) with a path coefficient of 0.703 ( $t=38.114$ ), and again *H1* is supported; and (c) the mediator (external political efficacy) has a significant influence on the predicated variable (public deliberation) with a path coefficient of 0.417 ( $t=9.556$ ), again supporting *H2*, with the path coefficient of the predictor (internal political efficacy) to the predicated variable (public deliberation) of 0.365 ( $t=7.807$ ), which is significantly reduced, supporting *H3*. Partial mediation is established when the (c) path remains significant but is substantially reduced and the indirect effect is significant (Dutwin, 2003).

**Table 3**  
Path Coefficients from Partial Least Squares Analysis

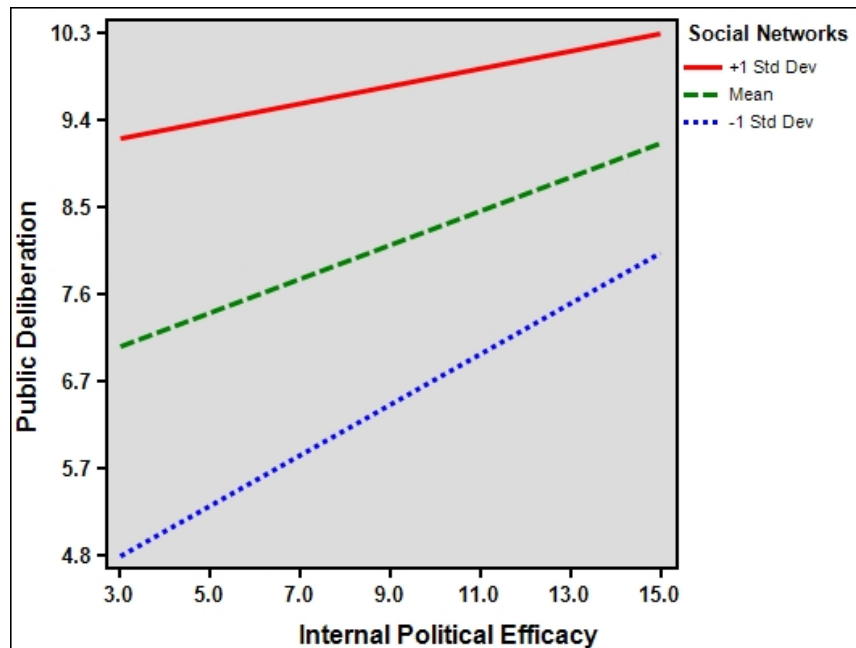
		Baseline Model		Mediated Model		Moderated Mediation Model	
		Path Coefs	T Statistics	Path Coefs	T Statistics	Path Coefs	T Statistics
H <sub>1</sub>	External efficacy -> public deliberation	.701	40.536	.417	9.566	-.202	-2.658
H <sub>2</sub>	Internal efficacy -> public deliberation	.726	40.157	.365	7.807	.291	4.725
H <sub>3</sub>	Internal efficacy -> External efficacy			.818	72.102	.861	93.679
	Social Network-> public deliberation					.852	8.274
H <sub>4</sub>	External efficacy*Social-net-> public deliberation					-.370	-5.428
H <sub>5</sub>	Internal efficacy*Social-net-> public deliberation					.164	2.724

The z-score is 8.999 which, being greater than 1.96 is significant at the 5 percent level (Dutwin, 2003), and implies that internal political efficacy has an indirect influence on public deliberation mediated by external political efficacy - supporting the mediating effects of internal political efficacy (*H3*). The VAF (Variance Accounted For), representing the ratio of the indirect effect to the total effect, indicates that 32.66 % of the total effect of internal political efficacy on public deliberation is explained by the indirect effect of external political efficacy.

Finally, the moderating effect is tested by estimating the influence of predictors (internal political efficacy and external political efficacy) on the predicated variable (public deliberation), the direct impact of the moderating variable (social networks) on the predicated variable (public deliberation) and the influence of the interaction variable (external political efficacy\*social networks and internal political efficacy\*social networks) on the predicated variable. The significance of a moderator can be confirmed if the interaction effect is meaningful, independently of the size of the path coefficients of the predictors and moderator to the predicated variable. In the present study, the paths of external political efficacy\*social networks and internal political efficacy\*social networks to public deliberation are -0.370 ( $t=-5.428$ ) and 0.164 ( $t=2.724$ ) respectively, which is significant at  $p < 0.05$  ( $t=1.96$ ). The moderating effects are therefore verified (*H4* and *H5*). Surprisingly, however, a higher social network moderates (*weakens*) the

relationship between public deliberation involvement and external political efficacy, ( $\beta = -0.370$ ,  $t = -5.428$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which is the opposite of the original hypothesis. The results for  $f^2$  show that the size of the moderating effect of social networks on the relationship between internal political efficacy and public deliberation involvement is 1.450 and social networks on the relationship between external political efficacy and public deliberation is 1.536. These values are large enough (Hess & Leal, 2001) to support the hypothesis, that is, that social networks moderate the relationship between political efficacy and public deliberation.

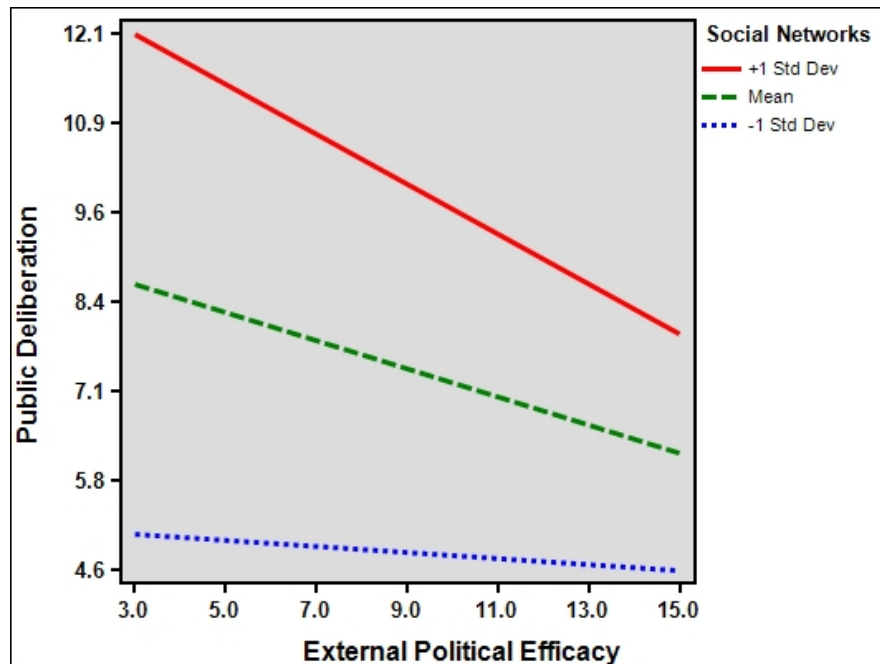
To explore the nature of the moderating effect further, the items of public deliberation for each pair of three items of political efficacy are summed into one variable representing respectively internal and external political efficacy, and adjusted to range from 5 to 15, with larger scores indicating higher frequencies or possibilities of deliberation. The interaction graphs of high (one standard deviation [SD] above the mean) mean and low (one SD below the mean) levels of the moderator are depicted in Figs. 2 and 3.



**Fig. 2.** Moderating effect of social networks on internal political efficacy's impact on public deliberation

Given mean or below-mean values of social network status, Fig. 2 shows a high internal political efficacy to be associated with increased involvement of public deliberation. The simple slope is 0.265 ( $t = 5.450$ ,  $p < .001$ ) when the values of social network status are below the mean. For higher scores of social network status, this relationship decreases, while internal political efficacy becomes related to the involvement of public deliberation (simple slope = 0.178,  $t = 4.241$ ,  $p < .001$  when it is mean). For the highest scores of social networks status, the relationship between

external political efficacy and involvement of public deliberation disappears. The simple slope is 0.066 ( $t= 0.091$ ,  $p= 0.059$ ) when it is above mean, but not significantly, corresponding to a buffer effect of social network status. All these results indicate that social network status moderates the relationship between internal political effect and involvement of public deliberation; for respondents with lower social network status, a high internal political efficacy is associated with increased public deliberation involvement; while for respondents with higher social network status, a high internal political efficacy is not significantly associated with increased public deliberation involvement. H4 is therefore supported.



**Fig. 3.**

Moderating effect of social networks on external political efficacy impact on public deliberation

The shape of the interaction effect of the external political effect and social network status on public deliberation involvement is illustrated in Fig.3, which shows that social network status moderates the relationship between public deliberation involvement and external political efficacy. The moderating effect of *H5* is verified, however, the simple slopes being -0.353 ( $t= -5.002$ ,  $p<.001$ ) when values of social network status are above the mean, -0.198 ( $t= -3.143$ ,  $p<.001$ ) when they are at the mean, and -0.043 ( $t= -0.690$ ,  $p=0.491$ , not significant) when they are below the mean. The slopes are all negative, which indicates that given every value of social network status, a high internal political efficacy is matched by decreased public deliberation involvement. Moreover, the negative slopes are different with different scales of social network status. The absolute simple slope value with above-mean social network status is larger than the value of the mean or below-mean social network status; that is, for higher scores of social networks status, this decreased relationship accelerates and external political efficacy

is then more related to decreased public deliberation involvement; corresponding to a buffer effect of social network status. In the context of rural China, it is possible that villagers with high social network centrality and high external political efficacy do not even involve themselves into public deliberation.

## 5 Discussion

The purpose of this study is to extend previous findings (Cook et al., 2007; Morrell, 2005; Neblo et al., 2010) concerning the effects of political efficacy, social network status on public deliberation involvement by shedding more light on the different impacts of internal, external political efficacy, and its social context. Based on data from rural China, it is found that internal and external political efficacy has a direct positive effect on public deliberation, that external political efficacy mediates the effects of internal political efficacy, and that social network status moderates the effects of political efficacies on public deliberation involvement. The study is one of the first to investigate simultaneously the psychological and social context of individuals to explore effects on their public deliberation involvement.

The study suggests that individuals with higher internal political efficacy tend to be involved in public deliberation more often because they feel they can understand how to take part in politics and can handle the challenges, conflicts or disagreements that occur in the deliberation process. Individuals with higher external political efficacy are also likely to become involved in public deliberation because they are confident that the system is responsive to them and others like them. These findings further support the dominant assumption of attitudes-to-behavior in political participation (Gastil & Xenos, 2010). The study provided additional evidence to show that individuals with higher political efficacy are more likely to participate in politics. Moreover, the study reveals a neglected pathway between internal political efficacy and public deliberation, in which internal political efficacy is both a powerful direct and indirect antecedent linked by external political efficacy. Two sequential processes may explain this finding. At first, internal political efficacy - the belief that one can understand politics and government and that political events can be influenced by the activities of individuals like themselves - produces individual attitudes and behaviors favoring public deliberation. And then, based on these attitudes and behaviors, individuals are then stipulated to form predispositions and create external attitudes (i.e., external political efficacy) toward political systems, in the belief that the political systems will positively respond to their political actions. Such attitudes in turn lead to behavior, namely, public deliberation involvement. These findings explore the inner relationship of political efficacy interplayed with public deliberation, which contributes to the fields of both political efficacy and public deliberation.

This study explored the moderating role of social setting on the effects of political efficacy on public deliberation involvement. No one with experience observing deliberative conferences and deliberative events would argue that equity and diversity are not important concerns for actors in the field. The social setting in which citizens discuss politics is an important antecedent of political participation (Scheufele, Nisbet,



Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004). Social networks have often been reduced to analytical constructs of quantitative, structural network methods (Scheufele et al., 2004). As a key sociological method, social network analysis can shed light on socially constructed identity categories, different dimensions of exclusion based on those constructions and the often-subtle social mechanisms through which discrimination and oppression occur. Thus, the need to investigate social network status effects on political activities has been argued in the election and other political participation literature, while the social network status influence on public deliberation involvement has remained underexplored. Thus, the study is at the leading edge. The contributions of this exploration are twofold.

First, the moderating role of social networks on the positive effects of political efficacy on public deliberation involvement is identified. This finding, in support of published reports and studies of the relationship between political efficacy and public deliberation (Cook et al., 2007; Morrell, 2005), suggests that their interplay should be viewed in the context of the existing specific social structure. The value of these findings should be assessed to extend the common theme that individual-level variables alone are insufficient in explaining political behavior, and that interactions within and across different types of social settings can be important catalysts for civic action (Scheufele et al., 2004).

Second, the exploration suggests that social networks facilitate the effects of internal political efficacy on public deliberation involvement, corresponding with Mutz (2002), social networks may well be detrimental to the effects of people's external political efficacy on public deliberation involvement. Two interrelated processes may lead social networks to weaken the effects of external political efficacy on public deliberation involvement. One is people's cognition of social and political rights; that is, individuals with high external political efficacy presume that political systems or deliberative systems maximize civil benefits when decisions are made, because they are confident in the system's responsiveness. Another process stems from the social influence of individuals with higher social network status; individuals with more social networks tend to be more influential on others and, because of the first process, they believe that it is unnecessary to involve extra public deliberation. The findings are therefore useful for our understanding of citizens' political attitudes and behavior in such a limited democratic society as China.

Managerially, the study suggests that the ubiquitous social networks exert a complex effect on the impact of individuals' political psychology on political behavior. These results imply that a better understanding of individuals' political behavior needs take into consideration both their psychology and the social setting of the psycho-behavior relationship. Specifically, the results suggest that higher political efficacy boosts public deliberation involvement although, for individuals with higher social network status, increasing internal political efficacy increases public deliberation involvement more than external political efficacy.

The present study is not without its limitations. First, the measurement of political efficacy and public deliberation is not ideal. The subjective self-reported recollection method used, for example, neglects the impact of individuals' emotion and latest

deliberative experience, which is likely to result in imprecise measurement. Further research may help improve this. A further limitation stems from the investigation of public deliberation. The utility of this construct and its component items may suggest that the presented conceptualization and measurement do not allow sufficient clarity in what constitutes public deliberation. In particular, the use of a single measure without separation of formal public deliberation (the formal institutions and processes of civic and political life) and discursive deliberation (the informal discourse with other citizens, such as talking, discussing, debating and/or deliberating) limits the capacity to determine which would be more affected by political efficacy and social network status. On the other hand, the scale utilized has been well validated in similar contexts. It may be an improvement for future research to distinguish between formal and informal deliberation, and specify the causal relationships between political efficacy, social network status and the two kinds of deliberation. Finally, since the findings presented in this study are based on a local rural Chinese survey, it is not possible to guarantee their generalization of these findings to the rest of the country. Nonetheless, the findings and implications do contribute to the understanding of the central question concerning the impact of political efficacy and social network status on individuals' public deliberation involvement in China, even to the rest of the world.

## 6 Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of political efficacies on public deliberation, and examined the social status role to condition the effects of political efficacies. Results suggest that both internal and external political efficacy has a positive effect on public deliberation involvement, and that internal efficacy has also an indirect impact on their public deliberation, which is mediated by external political efficacy. These findings explore the inner relationship of political efficacies interplayed with political participation, which contributes to the field of both political deliberation and efficacy research. Results also suggest that social network status moderates differently the effects of internal and external efficacy on public deliberation involvement. Specifically, the positive effect of internal political efficacy could be enhanced for individuals with a higher social network status, conversely, the positive effect of external political efficacy could be weakened for individuals who have a higher social network status. This study is one of the first to investigate simultaneously individual psychological and social determinants of public deliberation involvement, which could help understand and boost deliberative democracy in such less fully democratic societies as China.

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## Appendix:

**Measurement Validity.** Before testing the hypothesized relationships, measurement validity is first assessed. Table 2 summarizes the values for the average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability, R square, Cronbach's alpha and correlations between all the study variables. All Cronbach's alpha values, values for AVE and composite reliabilities are around or exceed the threshold values (0.7, 0.5 and 0.7, respectively). The construct reliability measures for the latent variables, therefore, are satisfactory. Discriminant validity is assessed at both the item level and the construct level. At the item level, the PLS confirmatory factor analysis indicates that all indicators load at their highest with their respective construct and that no indicator loads higher on other constructs than on its intended construct, which suggest that the discriminant validity of survey items is established. At the construct level, comparing the square root of each reflective construct's AVE and latent variable correlations (Table 2) suggests that discriminant validity is satisfactory. Evaluation of the reflective measurement models reveals that all constructs are of satisfactory reliability and validity for the purposes of the analysis.

**Multicollinearity.** The high correlation among political efficacy, social networks and public deliberation may be interpreted as reflecting a strong positive relationship

between these constructs, as was predicted in the hypotheses. However, it may also be indicative of scale item cross loading on both constructs and inaccuracy in measurement. Additional checks to assess the threat of multicollinearity include the variance inflation factor (VIF) when all these predictors are incorporated into the models. All VIFs are below 5.0 when all predictors are entered, and tolerance is over .2, which indicates that multi-collinearity is unlikely to be a significant issue affecting the validity of the results. These results, together with evidence that PLS SEM is robust to relatively high levels of multicollinearity, indicate that this is not likely to be a significant problem in the analysis.