Exploring Organisational Dissent in the Online Setting

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Abstract

Online organisational dissent is an emerging phenomenon in our digital world. It occurs when employees express disagreement or contradictory opinions about organisational practices, policies, and operations via internet. Organisational dissent research has investigated face-to-face dissent (FtF), but online employee dissent is at an early stage of understanding in terms of conceptualisations and methodologies of online dissent, and cultural distinction in relation to face concerns. Currently there is no conceptualization of online dissent yet. However, online organisational dissent can improve effective digital and cross-cultural communication.

To explore the digital communication issue and build the scholarship of conceptualizing online dissent, and to further clarify the benefits to employees, of dissent in online channels, this project consists of three empirical studies using complementary qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand online organisational dissent conceptually and empirically. Guiding research questions are as follows: 1) What is the relationship between organisational dissent, face concerns (self, other, mutual-face), and organisational assimilation? 2) How do face concerns and online anxiety (online communication apprehension, digital technology apprehension) shape the development of online employee dissent？ 3) What are the motivations of Chinese employees to dissent online?

Data was collected through survey agency Qualtrics and Wenjuanxing (equivalence of Qualtrics in China) for the U.S. and Chinese samples. Based on the different nature of the studies as predictive or explorative, the Structural Equation Model and Thematic Analysis were conducted in each study.

The main findings and implications include: a) illustrated face is an explanatory mechanism for organisational dissent; b) organisational assimilation serves as a conflict- ridden process for dissent; the self-presentation process (face) is more critical as a person assimilates into an organisation; c) virtual organisational dissent relates more confidence in technology than fear of approaching communication; d) employees used the online platformto negotiate face in organisational dissent. This project contributes to our understanding of how online dissent is

influenced by different psychological and cultural factors such as face concerns and anxiety in computer-mediated communication.

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List of original publications and articles

1. Croucher, S. M., Kelly, S., Chen, H., & Ashwell, D. (2020). Examining the relationships between face concerns and dissent. *International Journal of ConflictManagement*, *32*(1), 20-38.

2. Rahmani, D., Zeng, C., Chen, H., & Goke, R. (2022). *Online anxiety and virtual organizational dissent: An affordance approach to effects of online communication apprehension and digital technology apprehension* [Manuscript submitted for publication to the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*].

3. Chen, H., Croucher, S. M., Ashwell, D., Rahmani, D., & Zeng, C. (2022). *The impact of WeChat use on dissent: Applying uses and gratification theory to understand dissent* [Manuscript submitted for publication to the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*].

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<center>**Exploring Organisational Dissent in the Online Setting**</center>

<center>Hui Chen</center>

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

When employees feel alienated from their organisations, they may decide to keep silent or express disagreement, endure unpleasant experiences, change the status quo, or vent their emotions (Kassing, 1997). Organisational dissent is an essential form of workplace communication, beneficial for both organisations and employees. Constructive dissent provides organisations opportunities for improvement and innovation (Croucher et al., 2018; Graham, 1986) because employees can give valuable feedback regarding organisational inefficiency, employee discontent, unethical practices, and other organisational aspects (Garner, 2016). In addition, it serves as an indicator of employee work satisfaction, involvement, and work engagement.

However, many organisations penalise employees for expressing dissent (Garner, 2011; Waldron & Kassing, 2011). Thus, dissent expression is risky in terms of economic and social-cultural harm to self. Employees tend to consciously hold related information and stay silent (Zeng, 2018). Furthermore, not all organisations are ready to recognise and respond to employees' dissent (Croucher et al., 2018). Due to the benefits of dissent and organisations' failure to use it, this communication activity has garnered much attention from scholars in the last 20 years, challenging the traditional view that "management knows best" (Kassing, 2011a; Zhan & Hample, 2016).

The prevalence of intercultural workforces and virtual corporations involves employees and managers from various cultural backgrounds and geographical locations who may never see each other. Workplace communication is increasingly shaped by online and digital interchanges (Dwivedi et al., 2020) and employees are increasingly voicing their concerns about their organisations online (Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2018).

Although a significant number of scholars have examined face to face dissent (FtF),

employee dissent via social media and online platforms remains an underdeveloped area in dissent research (Garner & Peterson, 2020; Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2018). There are minimal publications exploring employees' online dissent. Online dissent occurs when employees express their opposed opinions on their workplace policies, practices, and operations via the internet. The earliest online dissent work, by Gosset and Kilker's (2006) work found employees used the Radioshack website to express dissent, as it had the benefits of more control over anonymity, provided more structure to the discussion, and helped them build collective action. Most recently, in 2020, Garner and Peterson also found connecting with others was a driving factor for sharing dissent online. They explained that there is a practical weight of dissent on employees as they battle with what their online dissent may accomplish versus the cost as a result of their decision to dissent. My project responds to Garner (2017)'s call to explore dissenting channels, such as social media, for expressing dissent due to their finding that the choices of communication channels made by dissenters influence the outcome of organisational dissent.

Additionally, this project responds to Ravazzani and Mazzei's (2018) call to focus on cultural variables influencing how people think about and conduct dissent. Due to legal protection for workplace democracy and freedom of expression connected to individualism and power distance, cultures appear to differ in their orientation towards dissent. For instance, the free-speech theory assures that in countries like the U.S., employees are still hypothetically entitled to protection when they express themselves freely in public. The rapidly growing global workforce including service and knowledge work is more digitalized than ever before, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This poses a critical challenge for employees and managers to work and communicate virtually and effectively and with people from various cultural backgrounds, especially in relation to conflict-inducing speech (Samson & Daft, 2015).

Thus, this project investigated two United States (U.S.) samples and one Chinese sample to build the scholarship of conceptualizing online dissent, and to further clarify the benefits of dissent in online channels. Specifically, the first U.S. sample tested the assumption that face is an explanatory mechanism for proclivity for organisational dissent. The second U.S. sample

explored the impact of digital technology apprehension and online communication apprehension on organisational dissent in virtual teams. In addition, the third project examined a Chinese sample to gain a cultural understanding of dissent via WeChat, particularly investigating the relationship between WeChat use and organisational dissent in China and the significance of face concerns in mediating dissent.

When choosing samples, there are several considerations as follows: Firstly, the study involves social media use. One reason for selecting the U.S. and China is because they have the highest social media users worldwide. Another rationale for analysing the U.S. is that most research on organisational dissent has originated there, including its measurement. The overwhelming majority of studies into dissent come from U.S. samples. Another reason for selecting China is because the notion of face originated in China, which is called mianzi in Chinese. I chose to do separate studies at the stage due to the constraints I was working with, namely that there is no existing social media equivalence between the two countries. As the first initial study of organizational dissent into a social, economic, political, legislative, and media environment, this creates many theoretical, methodological, and empirical opportunities for the future and promotes the global inclusivity of the field of (online) organizational communication. Investigating various national samples and comparison studies would be a potential area for further research.

1.2 Guiding Design, Research Purpose, and Outline

The overarching issue driving my study is conflict. Conflict in an organisation is a dynamic process underlying organisational behaviour, in which the behaviours and communicative actions of organisational members interact to impact the functioning of the organisation. During this process, members express themselves in a variety of ways. When members perceive decisions or policies in an organisation as ones they disagree with, they may express their discontent or conflict via dissent. As organisations are increasingly virtual, with members communicating online for a variety of reasons, this dissent or conflict is more likely to occur online.

Identity has been proved the most important to dissenters (Garner, 2009), reflecting the strong connections between employee resistance and employee's identities (Kassing, 2011a; Murphy, 1998). Social conflict identity found that identity conflicts entail activity in the Behavioral Inhibition System, which results in high stress and anxiety levels (Hirsh & Kang, 2016), and causes changes in individual behaviour patterns, such as organisational dissent where identities are put into questions (Farr & Ford, 1990). Altogether, conflict is the bigger construct of which dissent is one component. Identity also influences both of these. Thus, I see conflict as an over-arching approach to study dissent in an online context.

Organisational dissent can be part of conflict and they can be present together (Kassing 2011a). Hence, I began with looking at dissent as a form of conflict. "Face is about a claimed sense of interactional identity in a particular situation" (p. 325, Ting-Tommy, 2015). It is a fragile identity-based resource because it can be strengthened or challenged in every ambiguous social setting, such as conflict encounters. Therefore, face and facework deal with interpersonal self-worth and other-identity consideration issues (Ting-Tommy & Kurogi, 1998). Although face has been extensively linked with numerous forms of conflict communication (Oetzel et al., 2001; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2005; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), face concerns have been largely neglected in dissent study even though face concerns were used as theoretical grounding in Kassing's early work (2002; 2005). Examining the intricate relationship between face and dissent is necessary to understand the nature of dissent.

Exploring the nature of FtF dissent as face-threatening as the first study will be essential to building the online dissent scholarship. FtF dissent study must be the conceptual and theoretical ground for understanding online dissent as there is minimal study on online organisational dissent and no conceptualization of online dissent. Building from the first study, the next two co-occurring studies explore the effects of individual psychology (anxiety), and motivation in online dissent. Collectively, the three studies aim to build a richer understanding of online dissent consisting of contextual, psychological, and motivational components starting from investigating the essential nature of organisational dissent and conflict as face-threatening.

Research questions are put forth to explore relationships between face concerns, organisational assimilation, online communication apprehension, digital technology apprehension, motivations, and organisational dissent. Face negotiation theory, and media affordance theory are applied to understand the links between these constructs. Three articles were submitted for review that addressed the following macro-level research questions:

I.   What is the relationship between organisational dissent, face concerns (self, other, mutual-face), and organisational assimilation?

II.   How do face concerns and online anxiety (communication apprehension, digital technology apprehension) shape the development of online employee dissent?

III.   What are the motivations of Chinese employees to dissent (online)?

The three articles are co-authored. In the first two articles, I was involved in all parts of the study, from the initial outline, data collection, assisting analysis, and writing across the whole article. For example, I participated in the research design to choose variables, and scales to establish the rationale between the key variables. Based on the rationale included in the study, I piloted the research questions and hypothesis. Moreover, I synthesized the themes and wrote the discussion for theoretical and empirical implications, including all the practical recommendations to managers, employees, and organizations. Finally, I completed the article by providing most of the future directions. Last but not least, in the multiple rounds of journal reviews, I engaged with the reviewers' feedbacks and implemented the revisions myself. For the WeChat and dissent article, I led the article and wrote the whole article. The open-ended questions in the survey were developed with the support of all my supervisors. A scholar in China collected the data.

While I was part of team projects, I was in the whole process of designing, conducting, writing, and revision process and are using these skills to design my own research now. For example, in the design stage, I learned how to design research from underpinning philosophical assumptions, establishing conceptual and theoretical framework to piloting research questions and hypotheses. I have learned the involved data process techniques. More importantly, I have

synthesized the quantitative and qualitative research from dialectic point of view.

Eventually, I explored Chinese employees' dissent via WeChat, one of the most influential social media globally, in terms of the perception of organisational dissent connecting to employees' attitudes toward authority and face concerns. As employee dissent is associated with power, expressing organisational dissent is likely to be perceived as a challenge to the status quo. Chinese societies and organisations emphasise these unwritten rules and expectations while they guide Chinese organisations' communication. For example, in a superior-subordinate relationship, it's especially important for employees to support their superiors' social image. Furthermore, in WeChat, employees typically will give a like to their employer' posts to support the superiors' online face. I explored dissent in this new avenue. Therefore, I brought the research of dissent into a new social, economic, political, and virtual environment. This creates many opportunities in the future and promotes the global inclusivity of the field of organisational communication.

Article I, "Examining the relationships between face concerns and dissent", conceptualising dissent as a type of conflict, is the first study to link facework and organisational dissent (Croucher et al., 2020a).The empirical study examined the relationships between face concerns, articulated (upward) dissent, and organisational assimilation among a U.S. sample. Article two, "Online anxiety and virtual organisational dissent: An affordance approach to effects of online communication apprehension and digital technology apprehension," links anxiety in communication and digital technology use to employees' online dissent among a U.S. sample (Rahmani et al., 2022). Article three was titled "The impact of WeChat use on organisational dissent: Applying uses and gratification theory to understand articulated dissent in organisations" (Chen et al., 2022). The empirical study explored the effect of WeChat use on organisational dissent among Chinese employees working in China. I used open-ended questions asking Chinese employees' motivation to dissent.

The first article was published in *International Journal of Conflict Management*. The journal is Quartile 1 in Scimago Social Sciences Communication Category. This journal is also listed as an A in the Australian Business Dean's Council (ABDC) rankings. It's indexed in a

variety of databases and can publish open access. The journal publishes research related to levels of conflict (individual, team, organizational, country). Article one falls within their journal scope as it engages in topics such as: communication and conflict, conflict at work, conflict management, conflict and technology, and cultural influences on conflict management. The second paper was submitted to the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* for publication. It has an impact factor of 5.41. The journal is also one of the24 journals listed in the Shanghai rankings, making it one of the top journals in communication. CMC scholars from all over the world read and quote JCMC. The journal is interdisciplinary, covering a wide range of communication, business, psychology, and mediastudies research. Its primary focus is the social science study of computer-based media technologies for communication. The journal's most recent issues cover articles on internet communication and psychology. This article fits into these categories; thus, it continues the conversations in this journal. The third article was submitted to the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*. The journal promotes innovative research that advances our understanding of international, intercultural, and cross-cultural communication. It includes a wide range of views and methods, including qualitative, quantitative, critical, and textual approaches to academic research. Article three emphasises the urgency for developing a culturally specific understanding of organisational dissent based on employee perceptions. Italso cited resources from this journal to continue the discourse on dissent.

What follows is a narrative framework of key elements and a brief introduction to the key constructs of this thesis. Each of the following constructs is reviewed in more depth in each article included in this thesis.

2 Key Constructs

As face has been extensively linked with numerous forms of conflict communication, face concerns and organisational dissent are closely linked, therefore I started with conceptualizing dissent as a form of conflict. This project looks at organisations, and I was particularly interested in how employees assimilate into their organisations. This is because

organisational assimilation has been found to increase the likelihood of organisational dissent (Goldman & Myers, 2015). Prior organisational dissent research indicates the linking of communication apprehension, digital technology anxiety, and motivation. Overall, the aforementioned issue of conflict has illustrated these essential factors in exploring the conceptualization of dissent.

2.1 Face Concerns

Face is defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself bythe line others assume he has taken during a particular interaction" (Goffman, 1955, p. 213). Face concern is universal, pertaining to worries about one's image. Individuals differ in their extent of concerns for their self- or other-image. Three kinds of face concerns are classified: self-face is the concern for one's own image, other-face is concerned with another's image, and mutual-face is concern for both parties' images and/or the "image" of the relationship (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Face is a vulnerable identity and relational-based concern, which can be enhanced or threatened in uncertain situations. To regulate their social dignity and support or challenge others' social dignity in interpersonal conflict, individuals use facework strategies, a set of communicative behaviours (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Expressing organisational dissent involves putting interpersonal relationships and face in a conflicted situation. Thus, individuals monitor their dissent with concern to negotiate face ina socially desirable way, depending on the degree to which they care about how others and society perceive them.

2.2 Organisational Assimilation

Organisational assimilation is the "processes by which individuals become integrated into the culture of an organization" (Jablin, 2001, p. 755). The process encompasses learning, negotiation, and adjustment phases. Research has identified eight discursive messages that new employees should learn for assimilation. In the membership negotiating process, employees must adjust to eight themes to adapt to organisational life, "role expectations (clarity, ambiguity), group and organisational norms, formal structure, socialization from external and indirect sources, identity and identification, power relations, and socializing and ongoing interaction (Scott & Myers, 2010, p. 91)".

The extent to which an individual is socialized into an organisation has also been demonstrated to influence how they interpret organisational messages, respond to stimuli within the organisation, and interact with other organisational members, particularly supervisors. It is through assimilation that members become more familiar with the rules and norms of an organisation (Jablin, 2001; Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Also, through assimilation members learn how that particular organisation handles conflict situations (Jablin, 2001; Yang, 2008). Members attain a level of not only competency in the organisation, but also learn from others how to and what to communicate and act in the organisation.

2.3 Online Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) is the "broad-based fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated [oral] communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). CA can be perceived as a trait or contextual feature across four contexts: dyadic, meetings, public, and small groups. Trait CA is the accumulated amount of anxiety individuals experience in all these contexts. State CA is anxiety in dyadic, smallgroups, meetings, and public situations (McCroskey, 1977).

CA has been extensively studied through situational approaches. These, together with the biological approach, are the two main approaches to studying CA. The former approach isbased on neurobiological foundations; the latter focuses on the environment, such as culture and social learning (Rahmani, 2017). Most scholarly attention has been given to face-to-face situations where CA is studied from situational approaches among U.S. samples or comparing the U.S. and non-U.S. contexts. The research found CA is negatively associated with both willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence (Croucher, 2013; Rahmani, 2017; Teven et al., 2010) because individuals with higher levels of communication apprehension have higher anxiety levels about the possibility of negative evaluation and face threats, resulting in higher chances of withdrawing from communication. CA is positively related to higher levels of collectivism where group performance, conformity, and harmony are strongly emphasised above personal activities, while higher levels of individualism correlated with lower levels of CA where personal space and needs are prioritised (Croucher et al., 2015).

When communication apprehension occurs virtually, it is referred to as online communication apprehension (OCA), also known as computer-mediated communication apprehension (CMCA), the fear or anxiety someone feels in real or anticipated communication (Hunt et al., 2012). Online communication and increased organisational member engagement have created digital spaces for embracing dissensual voice and realizing constructive conflict with a view to creativity due to the anonymity afforded online, facilitating more disclosure with less fear perception (Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2018). Employees can respond to tensions by expressing online dissent, the online expression of disagreement or divergent ideas concerning organisational policies, procedures, and practises (Kassing, 1997). Employees' decision to dissent is likely to be influenced by the level of anxiety they experience due to ongoing or the potential of organisational dissent, as dissenting can inherently be a contentious and stressful process (Zeng & Chen, 2020). It has been found that the lack of verbal cues in electronic messages increases OCA generally for all people (Smeltzer, 1986) because of decreased accuracy in interpreting the messages. Therefore, individuals with higher CA levels might be more stressed when expressing their contradictory opinions, pushing them to avoid dissent and anxiety.

On the other hand, it has been found that online communication reduced apprehension for shy individuals (Hammick & Lee, 2014). Online communication might therefore provide more potential and possibilities for employees to communicate their divergent viewpoints with their various affordances. Prior studies have noted that anonymity allows individuals to perceive less fear of retaliation in the online environment (Gosset & Kilker, 2006; Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2018). Online communication's asynchronicity and editability may make it possible for employees to dissent more appropriately because individuals perceive less worry about regulating involuntary reactions as they have increased control of their messages by modifying content (Evans et al., 2017; Hastings & Payne, 2013). Moreover, visibility and association allow people to readily access other employees' views (Evans et al., 2017), which enables employees to build collective power and encourage their dissent (Garner & Peterson, 2020; Gosset & Kilker, 2006).

As illustrated, online communication apprehension (OCA) is a form of socially constructed anxiety, while the following construct, Digital Technology Apprehension (DTA), relates to another form of online anxiety, technologically based apprehension. OCA is socially constructed because it is about how much someone has anxiety about communicating with other people in a real or anticipated situation over the internet. However, the second one, DTA is related to the anxiety of using digital devices, the anxiety one might have of working with smartphones or other electronic applications. Therefore, this form of anxiety, predominantly, is not about communication but it is about technology.

2.4 Digital Technology Apprehension

Digital Technology Apprehension (DTA) is the anxiety about working with technology (Cambre & Cook, 1985; Scott & Rockwell, 1997). It is also referred to as computerphobia, technology anxiety, technophobia, and computer fear (Scott & Rockwell, 1997). DTA is the perception of one's ability or self-efficacy in using technology (Thatcher & Perrewe, 2002). On the one hand, DTA may inhibit engagement with technology and limit online communication, including Virtual Organisational Dissent (VOD). On the other hand, when employees are determined to voice their unhappiness, they may overcome their DTA, especially in light of the various media affordances (Rice et al., 2017).

DTA and other anxieties reduce inclusion chances (Di Giacomo et al., 2019), can restrict thought-action options, and increase avoidance and escape behaviours (Burns et al., 2019) in situations that heavily rely on cognitive processing, including organisational dissent (Nemeth, 1995). On the contrary, the Anxiety-Uncertainty Management theory explains that more anxious people tend to decrease uncertainty by exerting more control over their surroundings (Gudykunst, 1995). Because neuroticism is linked to anxiety (Beatty & Pascual-Ferrá, 2015), employees high in neuroticism may pay greater attention to little details and have a low tolerance for poor performance. In this aspect, those employees use dissent to establish/restore authority in the workplace. Employee psychological qualities may play a role in the link between DTA and online dissent (Rahmani et al., 2022).

2.5 Motivation

"Motivation is the set of forces that initiates, directs, and makes people persist in their efforts to accomplish a goal" (Williams, 2012). Early research on dissent focused on principled dissent, resulting from moral, ethical, legal concerns (Graham,1986). Later studies found that when employees voice dissent, self-interested and principled benefits can be presented simultaneously (Kassing,1997). These studies indicated that dissenters might be motivated by multiple goals. Garner (2009) conducted an initial study to identify dissenting goals. The prevalent primary goal is to get advice and information, followed by identity and conversation management as common secondary goals. Identity was proved the most important to employees, while surprisingly, protecting personal and relational resources was the least important secondary goal as these are typically the suspected self-interest goals. Identity is the most important concern to dissenters-enhancing the powerful links between employee resistance and their identities (Kassing, 2011a) and face concerns in dissent and other difficult communications where their situated identities are questioned (Oetzel et al., 2001).

2.6 Organisational Dissent

Kassing (1997) proposed a three-stage model of dissent incorporating four elements: (a) triggering agent; (b) strategy selection influences; (c) strategy selection; and (d) expressed dissent. In the first stage, multiple issues can constitute triggering agents for dissent, may concern ethical issues, issue import, or harm/risk to self and others. At least three factors come together to determine individual tolerance for dissent triggers: risk of retaliation, issue seriousness, and the likelihood that the issue will be addressed. The degree of our tolerance for dissent is largely influenced by the possibility of retaliation. Therefore, when a triggering agent exceeds an individual's tolerance for compliance (Redding, 1985), employees must therefore choose a specific strategy for expressing dissent (Kassing, 2011a).

The second stage is strategy selection, where individuals evaluate how their dissent will be perceived as constructive or adversarial and the potential for retaliation. The process takes place in a complex environment including organisational, relational, and individual factors. Organisational factors such as workplace policies on freedom of speech, play a primary role in

shaping employees' beliefs as to whether their voicing of oppositional opinions will be perceived as positive or negative. Relational factors, such as the quality of superior-subordinate relationships, may influence employee readiness to express articulated dissent. Regarding individual factors, argumentativeness, for example, increases articulated dissent, while employee burnout from an accumulated sense of powerlessness decreases their latent dissent. These varying factors serve as the backdrop for employees' well-informed evaluation to use an actual strategy for their expressing dissent, including articulated, latent, and displaced.

In the next stage, three forms of dissent are identified based on audience selection: articulated, latent/antagonistic, and displaced. When employees believe they will be perceived as constructive with no retaliation, they tend to use articulated dissent, open and direct communication to influential organisational members. When they believe they will be perceived as adversarial but yet feel somewhat protected from retaliation due to their organisational power, such as familiar connections, specific knowledge, or priority position, they are likely to express opinions to ineffective audiences (i.e., coworkers) rather than superiors with organisational power. When employees worry they will be seen as adversarial and endure high retaliation, they will vent displaced dissent, expressing criticism to external audiences (i.e., friends, family, and significant others) (Kassing, 1997). Figure 2 is a visual depiction of how Kassing (1997) conceptualised dissent.

FIGURE 2: Copy of original organisational dissent model (Kassing, 1997, p. 323)

While Kassing's conceptualisation of dissent is most extensively explored, it is limited in three aspects. First, it focuses too much on dissenters, even though dissent audiences play an active role in constructing the dynamic process of dissent. Thus, dissent is addressed as an action that dissenters do while audiences (supervisors and coworkers) receive passively rather than an interaction in which several people participate (Garner, 2013). Dissent is defined as the "interactive process that occurs due to one or more subordinates expressing disagreement with policies, practices, or imperatives" (Garner, 2017, p. 27). Second, Kassing's conceptualisation ignores sequences of dissent events in perceiving dissentas a single instance but not as a continuous stream of action (Garner, 2013). Thus, it excludesan individual who has dissented multiple times. By applying the process theory, Garner (2013) proposed that dissent events consist of three stages: precipitation, initial conversation, and residual communication, where the events interact continually before, during, and after adissent conversation. Third and finally, Kassing's definition situates dissent in the face-to-face sphere while the online environment is not included, even though employees also dissent online.

2.6.1 Factors Influencing Dissent Expression

In the last two decades, different aspects of dissent have been explored: triggering events, forms of dissent, goals, content of dissent messages, and determinants of whether to express dissent and to whom dissent is expressed. Most research has explored organisational dissent linked to various organisational (e.g., climate for voice, workplace freedom), relational, and individual factors for the determinants. Organisational culture, democracy, andclimate play an essential part in shaping employee perception of dissent. In a restrained workplace, a dissenter is more likely to be seen as a "trouble maker" instead of an "engaged employee" (Zeng, 2018). Workplace freedom of speech (WFS) is positively related to dissentintention to management because workplace freedom of speech can create a climate that values employee feedback and opinion sharing (Kassing, 2000a). In addition, research suggested employees express less latent and displaced dissent when they perceive a higher level of fairness in organisations (Kassing & McDowell, 2008) and organisational reputation (Croucher et al., 2016). Having investigated more closely, Goodboy et al. (2008) found that employees' perceptions of distributive and interpersonal justice negatively predict latent dissent, while perceptions of informational justice positively predict latent dissent.

Dissent as a co-constructed event involved not only dissenters but also the recipients (Garner, 2013; Zeng, 2018). When employees perceive a higher quality of the superior-subordinate relationship, a higher level of trust in supervisors, or a greater involvement in organisational decision-making, they are also more likely to express articulated rather than latent dissent (Croucher et al., 2017; Kassing, 2000b; Payne, 2014;Turnage & Goodboy, 2016). When employees perceive a higher level of isolation from fellow workers, they report lower levels of articulated dissent and avoid using latent dissent (Sollitto & Myers, 2015).

Employee dissent is a speech act influenced by various individual factors including individual personality traits and communicative traits. Employees who have higher levels of argumentativeness, higher internal locus of control, higher levels of organisational assimilation, higher Organisation-Based Self-Esteem (OBSE), lower levels of verbal aggressiveness, a higher position in the organisation, or longer organisational tenure appear to use more articulated

dissent (Croucher et al., 2009; Kassing & Avtgis, 2001; Payne, 2007), while higher levels of burnout relate to lower levels of articulated dissent (Avtgis et al., 2007). Research has increasingly explored moderating variables to understand dissent better. Croucher et al. (2009) found that argumentativeness and dissent were not positively correlated, and tenure did not relate to dissent in a cross-cultural study in the United States and India. Their study asserted that the conceptualisation of argument influenced this relationship. Ingwar (2014) found that internal locus of control and individualism orientation was positively related to upward dissent, consistent with the previous finding. However, external locus of control and collectivism were also positive predictors of upward dissent. It might be because of a demographic shift happening in traditionally collective cultures, where younger generations are more individualistic and taught to speak up to protect community welfare (Kassing, 2011a). Cenkci and Ötken (2014) found OBSE mediating the relationship between employee dissent and turnover intention in the Turkish context. They confirmed that more upward dissent signals less turnover intention (Kassing et al., 2012) on the condition that employees aimed to provide constructive feedback, while more turnover intention was predicted with the aim of challenging organisational management and practices. In the study, they indicated that the different findings could be related to cultural differences.

Croucher et al., (2014) found dissent was not positively correlated with workplace freedom of speech (WPFS) in a cross-cultural study in Finland, France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom. They found that nations with more employment legislation or less economic pressures on organisations had more dissent and WPFS, because insufficient legal employment protections discouraged dissent when employees perceived dissent might harm job security. Zhan and Hample (2016) illustrated a cost-benefit estimation mediating the main effects of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness on dissent expression. Croucher et al. (2018) proposed that the link between dissent and humour orientation would differ culturally because of power distance and individualism/collectivism. In addition, the authors asserted that political systems shape perceptions of authority and their participation in organisations. Dissent does not take place in a vacuum; a careful and comprehensive understanding of dissent considering

economic, national, cultural and/or political factors is necessary (Croucher et al., 2018; Croucher et al., 2014). Along with the previous research, Yee et al. (2018) suggested considering national culture and legal system influences in dissent strategy selection. Zhan and Hample (2016) advised combining cost-benefit modelling to understand dissent. Research is also expanding the intricate links between personality traits and dissent orientation, such as perceived employee sense of humour (Croucher et al., 2018; Garner et al., 2015).

2.6.2 Upward Organisational Dissent Strategies

Several studies also investigated how employees express their dissent in terms of dissent strategies. Kassing (2002) identified a typology of five strategies of upward dissent: direct-factual appeal, solution presentation, repetition, circumvention, and threatening resignation. *Direct-factual appeal* involves supporting one's dissent claim with evidence and knowledge of organisational practices and processes, and personal work experience. *Solution presentation* entails providing a solution to address the dissent-triggering issues rather than or in addition to evidence. *Repetition* calls for raising a concern verbally or behaviourally over time in order to draw attention to it, and often collectively with other employees. *Circumvention* constitutes going around one's immediate supervisor or boss to express dissent to someone higher in the organisations. Additionally, *threatening resignation* is threatening to quit as a weapon to pressure the supervisors and management for their responsiveness and actions. Based on this typology, Garner (2009) proposed an initial Dissent Messages Scale that measures the content of 11 different types of dissent messages, consisting of Ingratiation, Direct-Factual Appeals, Exchange, Circumvention, Coalitions, Pressure, Inspiration, Repetition, Threatening resignation, Solution presentation, Venting, Asking for information, and Humor. After testing, the author discovered that many of the categories he suggested collapsed in terms of scale development and measurement. Having tested the typology (Kassing, 2002), Kassing and Kava (2013) determined that these two categories of solution presentation & direct-factual appeal collapsed into prosocial upward dissent. Therefore, the Upward Dissent Scale consists of four dimensions: prosocial (solution presentation & direct-factual appeal), threatening resignation, circumvention, and repetition.

2.6.3 Dissent via Social Media

Organisational dissent scholars have found employees are voicing dissent via computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media as it permits anonymity and safety with less fear of risk and retaliation (Kassing, 2011a). More importantly, compared to FtF dissent, employees can better create and manage their desired impression to an audience when they dissent online. Early research illustrated that the RadioShack website provided the dissent function to organisational members. It has been found that the participants used the Website to overcome real or perceived communication barriers, where the primary barrier is face concern (Gossett & Kilker, 2006). A later study found that email is used to provide a greater controlled effect by constructing messages to be perceived as positive or conflict- ridden messages. It also found that employees' leader-member exchange status (in-group vs out-group) influences employees' choice to express dissent (i.e., articulated, latent, displaced)via email or FtF. Out-group employees, with a lower level of Organisational Assimilation (OA), were more likely to express articulated dissent through email, whereas in-group employees, with higher levels of OA, were more likely to express articulated dissent FtF (Hastings & Payne, 2013). Research also indicated that when dissent posts are intended to bepublic, online dissenters are generally anonymous or dissent is issued under fictitious names (Stitzlein & Quinn, 2012). Dissent via CMC and social media straddles and spans the internal/external divide because dissent can be internal and external, such as dissent expressed outside workplaces can reach management (Kassing, 2011a).

Dissenters worldwide have expressed their opinions via CMC and paid dearly. As media news is an important source of information for most people, it plays a crucial role in the process of how the public learns, understands, and perceives an event (Ashwell, 2012). Responses to dissenters reported in media influence individuals' assessment of how safe it isto express dissent through media. Moreover, CMC and social media availability have been linked to changes in a psychological state (e.g., self-presentation concerns). Permitting a degree of anonymity, people disclose more information about themselves, less socially desirable messages, and face concern than equivalent FtF contexts (Joinson, 2004).

To conclude, the existing online dissent literature indicates the above constructs affecting the affective and contextual understanding of online dissent. Hence, a model was proposed (See figure 1 below).

FIGURE 1: Guiding framework
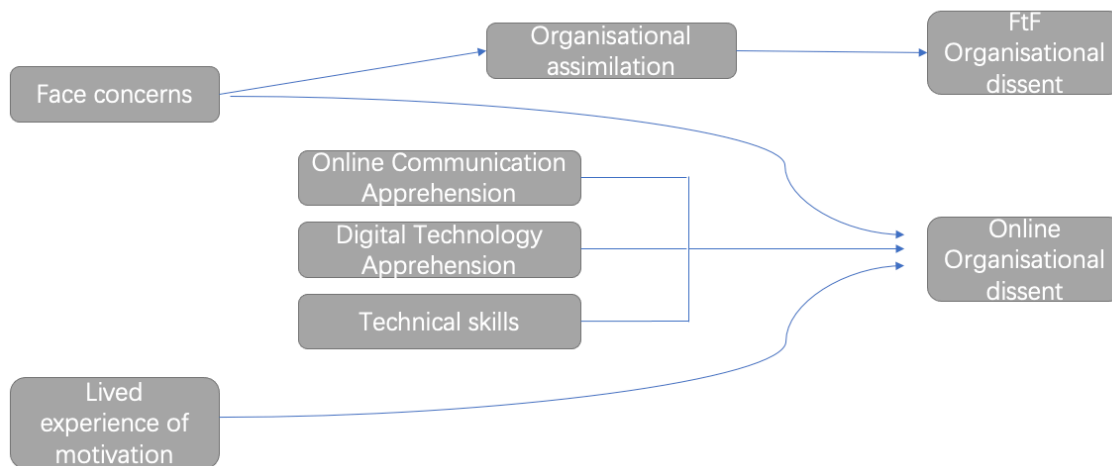
The hypothesised associations among the constructs is displayed in Figure 1. The whole dissent process starts with employees' lived experience of motivation, and the outcomes consist of FtF organisational dissent and online organisational dissent. Face negotiation theory assumes that face is an explanatory factor between cultural, individual, and situational level variables and real or perceived conflict situations (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Conceptualising organisational dissent as a type of conflict (Zeng, 2018), face concerns is likely to play the role of explanatory factors in dissent. Face concerns is associated with organisational assimilation, which leads to organisational dissent. Two forms of online anxiety, online communication apprehension and digital technology apprehension, have paths to online organisational dissent. The model in Figure 1 represents the relationships between the variables based on the literature review. The following hypotheses and research questions were put out in light of this model's presentation of the various concepts and paths between them:

H1: Face concerns will be positively related to organisational assimilation.

Regarding self-presentation and self-regulation, more integrated employees engage in social interactions with other organisational members more frequently and actively (Waldeck & Myers, 2007). More assimilated employees frequently speak in ways to preserve their self-image

and present themselves as competent communicators. Moreover, the social distance or proximity between the more assimilated employees and others reduces as the employees pass from the encounter stage to metamorphosis. The decreased proximity makes us closer and more accountable for others when they express our disapproval (Croucher et al., 2021). As a result, the more we get to know and like our coworkers, the more probable we will act in a way that protects mutual faces when we express our dissent. Altogether, employees with higher levels of assimilation appear more prone to have stronger self-face, mutual-, and other-face concerns. Therefore, face concerns is likely to affect organisational assimilation positively.

H2: Organisational assimilation will be positively related to organisational dissent.

Research has found that organisational assimilation is positively related to the frequency of organisational dissent (Goldman & Myers, 2015). More assimilated members have higher levels of job satisfaction, identification, engagement, and higher quality of communication with their organisational members. Therefore, they have more face security to express organisational dissent.

RQ1a: What is the impact of Online Communication Apprehension (OCA) on Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD)?

RQ1b: What is the impact of Online Communication Apprehension (OCA) on Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD)?

The relationships between online communication apprehension and virtual organisational dissent are uncertain as they can be double-folded. One the one hand, employee dissent is primarily considered an active, confrontational communication act (de Dreu et al., 2000). Therefore, organisational members may experience a high level of anxiety when considering dissent or not, which might be more intense for individuals with higher levels of virtual communication apprehension and may hinder their motivation to dissent. On the other hand, the higher levels of anxiety they endure might lead them to dissent to manage their stress and anxiety, as prior dissent researchers showed that employee dissent could result in emotional release and support (Sollitto & Myers, 2015).

RQ2a: What is the impact of Digital Technology Apprehension (DTA) on Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD)?

RQ2b: What is the impact of Digital Technology Apprehension (DTA) on Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD)?

Similarly, the paths between Digital Technology Apprehension and organisational dissent are unknown. DTA or computerphobia refers to the fear or apprehension associated with the real or anticipated use of information technology utilities. The level of anxiety they feel and endure while using technology can prevent their engagement with technology and various forms of online communication, such as virtual dissent. It is also possible for them to dissent to overcome the obstacles of DTA to meet their cognitive psychological needs, such as restoring control of the outside.

Technical skills are also considered in testing the relationships between Online Communication Apprehension, Digital Technology Anxiety, and Virtual Organisational Dissent, as performance on jobs in an environment where computer use is highly impacted by one's technological proficiency and comfort (Taha et al., 2014). Lack of knowledge of online technology is another big communication obstacle (Lyles et al., 2020). A higher level of technical proficiency can boost VOD because online communication requires adequate technical ability. Consequently, technical skills were controlled for this study.

RQ3: Why do employees use WeChat to express organisational dissent?

RQ4: What is the role of face concerns on WeChat use in relation to organisational dissent?

In summary, with conflict as the thesis's overarching drive, this project examined the influence of cultural and individual factors on FtF and online organisational dissent and employees' lived experience of motivation in online dissent. The quantitative portion of this study examined the relationship between face concerns, online communication apprehension, digital technology anxiety, and organisational dissent. The influence of organisational assimilation on the relationship between face concerns and organisational dissent was also tested. In the qualitative portion of this study, Chinese employees' perception of online dissent,

particularly their lived experience of their motivation in WeChat, was explored. Both face

negotiation theory and media affordance theory provided support for this project. This project

built the conceptual understanding of online dissent from cognitive and affective processes at

cultural and individual levels, including psychological and motivational factors.

3. Methodologies

A paradigm is a world view that is defined by various factors, such as epistemology (how we come to know what we know), ontology (nature of reality), axiology (values), and methodology (how research is done) (Hanson et al., 2005). The positivist (quantitative) paradigm or constructivist (qualitative) tradition that the researchers identify with significantly impacts their worldview (Doyle et al., 2009). According to the positivist/social scientific paradigm, the reality is already "there" and can be seen, identified, and understood. Many social scientists adhere to determinism, which holds that people's behaviour is predominantly influenced by observable internal factors and external causes (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2014). In general, the constructivist/interpretive paradigm favours voluntarism or the idea that people may deliberately reason decisions (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2014). In the paradigm war, quantitative purists and qualitative purists believe that quantitative research and qualitative research are based on different research paradigms and pursue different aspects of epistemology, axiology, ontology, methodology in different positions and assumptions.

Critiques of paradigm incompatibility and numerous cross-disciplinary studies raise the bar for methodological diversity and proficiency. In response to the growing "complexity of research problems, the legitimization of qualitative inquiry, and the need for more evidence in applied settings" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 50), researchers from a variety of different disciplines started to discuss and write about the benefits of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in the late 1980s. This evolution has developed a methodological bridge between qualitative and quantitative research traditions and has gradually made way for mixed methods research (MMR) in many more domains (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

3.1 Mixed Methods Research

3.1.1 Definition

Mixed methods "is the type of research in which a researcher or a team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and

quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson, et al., 2007, p. 123). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) updated the definition also from a methodological perspective. They defined MMR as a research strategy that includes both methods of investigation and philosophical assumptions. It is a methodology that uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in various stages of the research process and philosophical presumptions that guide the direction of data collection and analysis. It focuses as a methodology on gathering, examining, and combining quantitative and qualitative data in a single research or series of studies. Its central argument is that combining quantitative and qualitative methods yields a more excellent grasp of study issues than either. Creswell and Clark (2011) have expanded on their definition by defining core characteristics of mixed methods research that emphasizes study design orientation in addition to philosophical orientation and methodologies. In detail, their updated definition also focuses on the following:

"research questions that call for real-life contextual understandings, multi-level perspectives, and cultural influences";

"employing rigorous quantitative research assessing magnitude and frequency of constructs and rigorous qualitative research exploring the meaning and understanding of constructs";

"framing the investigation within philosophical and theoretical positions" (p. 4)

3.1.2 Pragmatism

Even though there are incompatibilities in basic beliefs such as ontology, epistemology, and axiology, the pragmatists hold that both methodologies can be applied in single research regardless of the conditions (Hanson et al., 2005). They argued from the following three aspects, first, they disagree with the opposing paradigms. During the debate, more and more researchers agree that there is an intermediate state between the objective and the subjective. We need to seek the so-called objective facts relying on subjective understanding. On the one hand, social phenomena fundamentally differ from natural phenomena; it contains the subjective understanding of social members' behaviours toward themselves and others. Since the majority

of social science knowledge is not observable in nature, it differs significantly from knowledge in the natural sciences. Most of the variables we deal with, such as feelings, ideas, attitudes, and intentions, cannot be measured outside of ourselves in the same way that objects can be studied in the natural sciences; instead, they must be expressed in order to be understood (Ma, 2012).

Therefore, on the one hand, social science research relies on the researcher's "subjective" intuition and understanding to get the meaning of these behaviours and thoughts (constructivist paradigm). On the other hand, there are specific "laws" to be found in social behaviour, and research can find these "laws" (positivist tradition) (Creswell, 2009; Li & Wang, 2016). "Pragmatists have believed in an external world independent of the mind as well as that lodged in the mind" (Creswell, 2009, p. 28). As a result, compatibility theorists believe that paradigms and their methods are not diametrically opposed. They are more like a spectrum, and mixed methods research is the embodiment of the continuity of the spectrum (Creswell, 2009; Li & Wang, 2016).

Second, they argued, among other things, that the research question should take precedence above all other considerations, including the method's theoretical framework or underlying paradigm (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Pragmatism "is pluralistic and oriented towards 'what works' and practice" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 41). In other words, pragmatism employs a variety of methods, but the methods should always be used in response to research questions. As a result, pragmatism is the most significant philosophical foundation for mixed-methods research by many MMR advocates (Howe, 1988; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Instead of being based on assumptions about the nature of knowledge, pragmatic thinking is simply focused on finding solutions to real-world issues (Creswell, 2014; Hall, 2013; Maarouf, 2019). "What works" is the central tenet of pragmatism. Instead of being based on assumptions about the nature of knowledge, pragmatic thinking is focused on finding solutions to real-world problems (Creswell, 2014; Hall, 2013). Therefore, many academics have emphasised that pragmatism can offer a philosophical basis for the mixed research strategy. For instance, according to Denscombe (2008) and Mitchell (2018), pragmatism is seen as the philosophical

spouse of the mixed research methodology because its guiding principles serve as the foundation for mixed research methodologies. Additionally, Johnson et al. (2007) concur that pragmatism is a cutting-edge philosophy that offers the logic and epistemology for combining quantitative and qualitative approaches and methodologies. Additionally, pragmatism is the philosophical approach that allows the mixing of paradigms, assumptions, techniques, and methods of data gathering and analysis, according to Creswell (2014).

The Ontological Stance. Based on the nature of mixed methods research in the pragmatist tradition, the quantitative and qualitative paradigms are combined as complementary, rather than antagonistic, from ontological, epistemological, and axiological viewpoints. According to the "ontological foundationalism" principle, a researcher must comprehensively understand reality to choose the appropriate methodological approaches (Lohse, 2016). The need for addressing the ontological distinctions between the two perspectives for pragmatism has been emphasised by numerous researchers. According to Morgan's argument in 2007, pragmatism suggests that pragmatic research is "intersubjective," which means it is both subjective and objective simultaneously and accepts that different people have different perspectives on the same reality.

Furthermore, pragmatism indicates that reality is external and multiple at the same time and that a researcher selects the view that best fits his study objectives, according to Saunders et al. (2009). Similarly, Johnson and Christensen (2012) noted that it is vital to comprehend both the objective and subjective views of reality when doing mixed research. Despite all these supporting viewpoints, many researchers contend that the ontological problem with pragmatism received little attention from academics. According to Morgan (2007), pragmatists reject the top-down dominance of ontological assumptions. They think that epistemological and methodological concerns should be kept apart from ontology. Also, Lohse (2017) criticised "anti-ontological pragmatism," which rejects ontological perspectives as unsuitable for conducting research.

In their pragmatic ontological debates, a precise ontological perspective that explains how a pragmatic researcher can move between two opposing ontological viewpoints to achieve his research goals is desperately needed. Pragmatism should originate from an ontological position

situated in the middle of the objectivity-subjectivity continuum to enable pragmatic researchers to view and apply diverse ontological views. This ontological position was conceptualised as the reality cycle (Maarouf, 2019).

Maarouf's reality cycle is based on the notion that there is only one reality in a given situation and that social actors have different perspectives of this reality. The reality cycle assumptions enable the pragmatic researcher to transition between the quantitative and qualitative research approaches and methods and between the two perspectives of the same external reality and the various perceptions of reality held by social actors. First, the reality cycle enables the pragmatic researcher to embrace the one-reality view and apply the quantitative approach to test a theory about reality, presuming reality is stable for the most part. Second, the reality cycle also presupposes that reality changes regularly, so the pragmatic researcher also considers that these generalisations will become out of date as the environment changes. Therefore, it is vital to pay great attention and review them as often as necessary to ensure that social science theories are still accurate and reflect reality.

The Epistemological Stance. Any knowledge type may be viewed as either visible or unobservable. The pragmatic researcher, as a result, accepts both types of knowledge based on their instantaneous ontological position. Their primary concern is to select the proper research method that is most relevant to this ontological position and best fulfils his research aims (Maarouf, 2019). Quantitative techniques, like surveys, typically deal with intangible mental variables rather than visible knowledge. Similar to quantitative research, defining social reality through qualitative observation of human behaviour does not deal with unobservable information; instead, it deals with observable human activities. Quantitative and qualitative approaches address the origin of knowledge in this double-faced knowledge aspect. Thus, this perspective establishes a connection between the pragmatic epistemological and ontological assumptions (Maarouf, 2019).

The Axiological Stance. Researchers that employ mixed techniques frequently express a variety of philosophical perspectives (Creswell et al., 2011). These viewpoints, which span pragmatic, transformative, postpositivist, and social constructivist worldviews, frequently

referred to as dialectical orientations (Greene, 2007). For instance, the tensions brought up by the various philosophical perspectives that researchers hold may make using mixed methods research challenging for them (Greene, 2007). However, mixed methods research also gives a chance to use a dialectical discovery to convert these conflicts into new knowledge (Creswell et al., 2011). A pragmatic viewpoint emphasises "what works," a variety of methods, the significance of the research problem and question, and the value of objective and subjective knowledge (Morgan, 2007; Creswell et al., 2011).

Similarly, according to Greene and Hall (2010), the dialectical stance and mixed methods research are "often the ideal combination" (p. 139). Philosophical bases are offered by both the dialectical position and the dialectical pluralist perspective. The dialectical position holds that any position (such as the postpositivist position) offers only one perspective on human phenomena, which is invariably partial. Given the complexity of social processes, it is possible to better grasp this complexity by utilising several perspectives (Greene & Hall, 2010, p. 124; Shan, 2021).

Klenke (2016) states that each paradigm makes assumptions about the values (axiology) a researcher brings to the decision-making process when choosing a method, participants, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Like all other paradigms, Pragmatists hold the axiological position that inquiry is value-bounded. They think that values matter a lot when conducting research and coming to conclusions from their findings (Subedi, 2016). According to Cherryholmes Regmi (1992, 2010), pragmatic research is motivated by expected outcomes. Where we desire to go in the broadest senses influences our pragmatic decisions about what to research and how to approach it.

3.1.3 Benefits

Mixed methods research is significant because it confronts fundamental philosophical problems with science, such as the nature of truth, and explores the link between subjective and objective reality (Tebes, 2012). This method provides various benefits from a practical standpoint, such as (a) being able to draw on each approach when neither is sufficient to address a particular research issue; (b) dealing with handling both exploratory and explanatory questions within the same study (Creswell & Creswell, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009); (c) performing

study in a new setting or deal with a new phenomenon. Then we encounter a circumstance where we lack the very minimum of information; we lack a tested hypothesis and a general understanding of the factors that might influence or explain this phenomenon (Maarouf, 2019).

3.1.4 Mixed Methods Research Design

My research project has these prior considerations for selecting mixed methods. Regarding the complexity of the research issue in my project and the exploratory and explanatory nature of the research questions, mixed methods are the best fit for the research problem and questions at this stage (Creswell & Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Maarouf, 2019).

First, there is a minimum conceptual understanding of online organisational dissent and the emerging digital and intercultural workplace communication issue, especially including both the U.S. and Chinese online contexts. According to Creswell et al. (2011), researchers can examine novel issues, complicated occurrences, and interactions in specific, every day experimental settings by including qualitative research in mixed methods studies. Second, mixed methods in an investigation must fit the research problem or question. Mixed methods are preferred when the research questions include both exploratory and explanatory. Neither quantitative nor qualitative method is sufficient to establish multiple perspectives and understand a research problem (Creswell, 2013).

The research questions have both explanatory and exploratory nature as follows. The explanatory questions attempt to explain the behaviours and the transitions between psychology and behaviours in terms of relevant covariates, such as face concerns and organisational dissent. The exploratory questions are related to employees' motivation in dissent via WeChat for more descriptive information.

    I.   What is the relationship between organisational dissent, face concerns (self, other, mutual-face), and organisational assimilation (explanatory)?

    II.   How do face concerns and online anxiety (communication apprehension, digital technology apprehension) shape the development of online employee dissent (explanatory)?

III.   What are the motivations of Chinese employees to dissent (online)? (exploratory)?

Quantitative research approaches help the generation of objective findings by using tools such as a survey. In contrast, qualitative research methods help understand the situation through indicative results by investigating using tools such as participant observation (Creswell, 2013). Altogether they provide a complete understanding of digital and intercultural workplace communication issues. For instance, qualitative data may make it possible to understand quantitative result metrics (Creswell et al., 2011).

Therefore, to best address the research purpose and research questions as explanatory and exploratory in this project, mixed methods were employed to complement each other. Combining research methods yields a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study (Doyle et al., 2009). Ultimately, collecting quantitative and qualitative data aims to address the complex and multi-faceted research issue of online dissent and to gain a conceptual understanding of online dissent extending from the theoretical grounding of FtF dissent. Specifically, the research investigates the relationship between employees' psychological factors (face concerns, online anxiety) and their (online) dissent. Essentially, this study explores the nature of organisational dissent from the following perspectives:

1) organisational dissent is perceived as a communicative act influenced by both external factors (such as organisational culture) and internal factors (such as, argumentativeness) (Croucher et al., 2009).

2) dissent is also a decision process made by a careful cost-benefit analysis evaluation (Zhan & Hample, 2016) and can be generated from feelings and emotions (stress, burnout) (Kassing, 2011b; Zeng & Chen, 2020).

Following the selected method, a specific mixed methods research design was selected for this study. The basic designs include Convergent Design, Explanatory Sequential Design, and Exploratory Sequential Design depicted in Figure 3; "In a concurrent design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analysed in parallel and then merged for a complete understanding of a phenomenon or to compare individual results. In contrast, in a sequential

mixed methods design, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses are implemented in different phases and each is integrated in a separate phase" (Ventakesh et al., 2013, p. 17, Creswell et al., 2021).

FIGURE 3: Original copy of basic mixed methods designs Creswell (2013, p. 38)
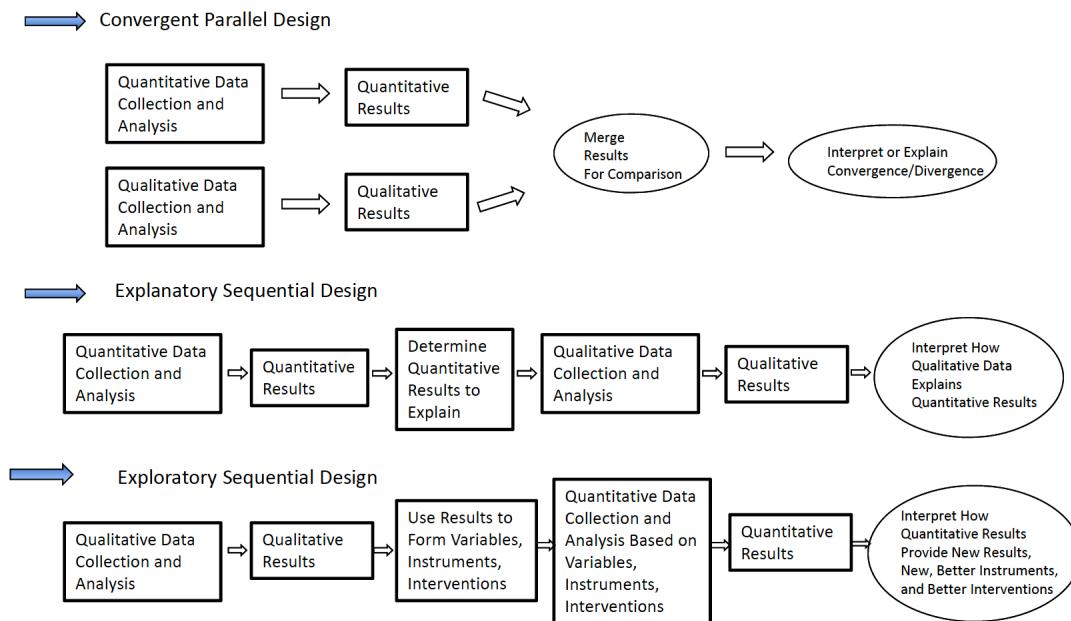
Key Considerations in a Specific MMR Design. According to Creswell et al. (2011) and Creswell (2003), three key considerations are identified in selecting a specific mixed methods design: timing, weighting (priority), and mixing stage. The first decision is timing. "Timing" relates to quantitative and qualitative strands, not only data collecting (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The two approaches can be integrated either concurrently (i.e., independently of one another) or sequentially (i.e., the results from one technique inform the other). The context and goals of the research should determine the type of method combination used. However, if the researcher anticipates that results from a method (either qualitative or quantitative) will support the later (quantitative or qualitative) study, then a sequential approach should be used. If the research goal is to understand the phenomenon as it happens, it seems that a concurrent approach will be better (Creswell, 2003). As the research aim is to investigate the digitalised and intercultural workplace communication without expecting results to support the later, concurrent

design was selected. As a result, the data for the three studies were collected separately. First, considering FtF organisational dissent scholarship established the theoretical ground for online organisational studies, especially the vital link between face concern and organisation dissent indicated in prior scholarship. Therefore, the study exploring face concerns and organisational dissent was conducted slightly earlier than the other two studies. The other studies were conducted simultaneously; there was no consequence for them. Altogether, all the quantitative and qualitative data were collected roughly concurrently.

Weighing the qualitative and quantitative techniques is the subject of the second choice. Studies can be prioritised in one of three ways:

1) quantitative priority (i.e., placing more emphasis on the collection and analysis of quantitative data)

2) qualitative priority (i.e., placing more emphasis on the collection and analysis of qualitative data)

3) equal priority (i.e., viewing both data sets as equally important to address the research questions)

Ideally, the weight is equal between the two methods in convergent design, while it rarely occurs in reality. One or the other may be given precedence (Creswell, 2009). The researcher's interests determine the priority of one type, the study's target audience (such as a faculty committee or professional association), the key points they want to highlight, and practical concerns (e.g. time, skills) (Creswell, 2009; 2013). This study is a quantitative priority because of my primary interest in testing a theory rather than generating themes; the quantitative research questions emphasise based on prior research indication and the majority of my scholarly community (e.g. most of my supervisors' professional background).

The third decision is the point of interface or the point where mixing occurs. Three possible points for mixing occurs:

1) during data collection (e.g. both quantitative and qualitative open-ended survey items are collected in the same survey);

2) during data analysis (e.g. qualitative data are transformed into quantitative scores or constructs to be compared with a quantitative dataset); or

3) during data interpretation (e.g. the findings of quantitative analyses are compared with themes that emerge from the qualitative data). When the data are independent, the researcher mixes the two approaches only at the data interpretation stage.

Based on the above considerations, convergent design (sometimes referred to as concurrent design or sequential design) was selected for this study. Convergent design occurs when "When the intent is to merge concurrent quantitative and qualitative data to address study aims, the investigator combines both quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell et al., 2011, p. 8)." "The qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analysed during a similar timeframe. During this timeframe, an *interactive* approach may be used where iteratively data collection and analysis drives changes in the data collection procedures. Frequently, the two forms of data are analysed separately and then merged (Fetters et al., 2016, p. 4)".

The collected quantitative data was analysed through a mixture of statistical tests: correlation, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), exploratory factor analysis (EFA), ordinary least squares, and structural equation models (SEM). Good research questions are produced concerning the objective or intent of our research, such as knowledge development, and they serve as a guide for what we want to discover (Demuth & Terkildsen, 2015). The qualitative research question explored why Chinese employees use WeChat to dissent. According to Braun & Clarke (2013), thematic analysis (TA) can reveal patterns in their (reported) activities, attitudes, or perspectives towards a particular issue. Hence, TA might offer the employees' perceptions of the digitalised workplace communication issue and the processes affecting their online organisational dissent, which is consistent with my research question. Altogether, TA was employed to analyse the qualitative data.

3.2 Measures

This project includes six scales: the Organisational Dissent Scale (Kassing, 2000a); the Face Concerns Scale (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001); the Organizational Assimilation Scale (Myers & Oetzel, 2003); the Online Communication Apprehension Scale (Ledbetter, 2009); the

Digital Technology Anxiety Scale (Cohen & Waugh, 1989). Surveys were distributed to respondents to measure the involved constructs in each study. Respondents were asked to use a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to indicate to what extent they agree with each statement in all scales. Theycame to a set of demographic questions to complete at the end.

3.2.1 Organisational Dissent Scale

The 18-item self-report instrument (Kassing, 2000b) measures the likelihood and frequency with which employees will verbally express contradictory opinions towards their organisational policies and practices face-to-face. The instrument gauges how employees express these opinions to two audiences: upward/articulated dissent expressed to management/supervisors; and lateral/latent dissent expressed to co-workers on a similar level (Kassing, 2000b). The current study focuses on dissent expressed for organisational members to receive. Displaced dissent is excluded because it is a non-organisational communication behaviour (Croucher et al., 2014; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002).

The organisational dissent scale has shown consistent reliability in previous research. Alpha reliabilities for articulated dissent ranged from 0.70 to 0.91. For latent dissent, it ranged from 0.76 to 0.89 (Zeng, 2018). Both the values are acceptable for the internal consistency test as they are greater than 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951). Sample items include "I speak

freely with my co-workers about troubling workplace issues". In the second study, items were modified to study dissent in a virtual context. The listed items were changed to "I speak freely with my co-workers in my virtual team about troubling workplace issues." The modified scale yielded satisfactory model fit: χ^2 (24) = 47.17, p < .001, CFI = .99, SRMR = .04, RMSEA = .05, PClose = .49.

3.2.2 Face Concerns Scale

This 22-item self-report instrument measures the extent to which an individual favours one type of face concern (self, other, and mutual-face) over another in a conflict. The respondents were asked to recall a conflict they had experienced recently with a person of thesame sex, same

ethnic/cultural group, equal status, and someone they are very close to.

Reliability scores for the measure have consistently been reported for each dimension (self, mutual, and other-face concern). For self-face concern, reliabilities have ranged from .66 to .85, for mutual-face from .68 to .80, and other-face from .78 to .91. The validity of the original Face Concerns Scale developed by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) was not confirmed. However, Oetzel et al. (2001) found the measurement of face concerns and self-construal were to be separate, χ^2 (3, $N = 768$) $= 404.75$, $p < .001$. Therefore, only face concerns were measured. Sample items include "My primary concern was saving my own face", "I was concerned with respectful treatment for both of us", and "I was concerned with maintaining the poise of the other person".

3.2.3 Organisational Assimilation Scale

Myers and Oetzel's (2003) 20-item index measures an employee's feeling as part of their organisation. It measures six dimensions of organisational assimilation: familiarity with supervisors, organisational acculturation, recognition, involvement, job competency, and role negotiation. Each dimension showed adequate to good reliabilities (all above .70), except job competence/knowledge and role negotiation falling below .70 (Croucher et al., 2016). However, Myers and Oetzel (2003) noted the dimensions might be combined for a universal measure of organisational assimilation. The scale was administered as it is developed in the U.S. context. Sample items include "I feel like I know my supervisor well" and "I talk to my co-workers about how much I like it here".

3.2.4 Online Communication Apprehension Scale

Ledbetter (2009) developed an 8-item Likert-type scale measuring Online Communication Attitude. Sample items include "I feel awkward when communicating online". The construct proved to be valid and reliable, χ^2 (5) $= 12.253$, $p < .001$, CFI $= .99$, SRMR $= .02$, RMSEA $= .06$, PClose $= .29$, CR $= .91$.

3.2.5 Digital Technology Apprehension Scale

Cohen and Waugh (1989) created a 16-item Likert type scale to measure using computer

Anxiety. Sample items include "I feel anxious whenever I am using computers". The construct proved to be valid and reliable χ^2 (100) = 230.98, p < .001, CFI = .97, SRMR = .03, RMSEA = .06, PClose = .10.

3.2.6 Open-ended Questions

Think about a disagreement you have had in your workplace in the last year. Did you express your disagreement? If yes, go to section A. If no, go to Section B.

A) To whom did you express your disagreement?

Where did you express it, online or face to face? In the workplace or outside your workplace?

Why did you make this choice?

Why did you express your disagreement?

Did you feel hesitant to express it? What were you worried about?

B) What were you afraid to express?

What are you worried about when you communicate disagreements?

3.3 Data Collection

Data has been collected through Qualtrics for the U.S. samples and Wenjuanxing for Chinese sample (a professional Chinese survey collecting platform). Web-based surveys may have advantages related to fast administration, low data entry errors, and possibly higher data quality than traditional survey options (Mikulsky, 2005). In addition, web-based surveys traditionally reach higher participation in accessing hard-to-reach groups (Lyons et al., 2005). On the other hand, they may be biased by selective and low involvement because participation requires internet access and computer literacy to complete the surveys (van der Vaart et al., 2011). However, as the overall project is to explore online dissent, potentially participants recruited via paper survey modes with limited internet literacy would not meet the sample requirements. More importantly, web-based surveys afford anonymity and perceived safety, which enhances participants' likelihood to provide information on socially sensitive topics (Mikulsky, 2005) and organisational dissent, especially for Chinese employees.

After excluding missing and disqualifying data, the final sample includes 356 participants

in the first paper, including 174 males, 179 females, 2 undisclosed and 1 other, with an average age of 39.74. There are 321 participants in the sample for the second study, including 135 males, 184 females, and 2 others with an average age of 39.07. For the third one, data was collected via professional Chinese survey collecting platform, Wenjuanxing. The cleaned sample includes 144 males and 166 females, with an average age of 35.82.

TABLE 1 Methods, Contexts, and Sample Size

Methods	Contexts	Sample Size
Surveys : face concerns, organisational assimilation, articulated dissent	US sample collected via Qualtrics	356
Surveys : online communication apprehension, digital technology apprehension, articulated dissent	US sample collected via Qualtrics	321
Open-ended Questions: motivations in dissent via WeChat	Chinese sample collected via Wenjuanxing	310

4 Articles Included in the Study

4.1 Article I

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the candidate and the candidate's Primary Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of candidate:	Hui Chen
Name/title of Primary Supervisor:	Professor Stephen Croucher
In which chapter is the manuscript /published work:	

Please select one of the following three options:

(●) The manuscript/published work is published or in press

   • Please provide the full reference of the Research Output:
   Croucher, S.M., Kelly, S., Chen, H., & Ashwell, D. (2020). Examining the relationships between face concerns and dissent. International Journal of Conflict Management, 32, 20-38.

(○) The manuscript is currently under review for publication – please indicate:

   • The name of the journal:

   • The percentage of the manuscript/published work that was contributed by the candidate:

   • Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the manuscript/published work:

(○) It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal

Candidate's Signature:	Hui Chen
Date:	28-Mar-2022
Primary Supervisor's Signature:	Professor Stephen Croucher
Date:	1-Apr-2022

This form should appear at the end of each thesis chapter/section/appendix submitted as a manuscript/ publication or collected as an appendix at the end of the thesis.

Examining the relationships between face concerns

and dissent

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between face concerns, articulated (upward) dissent and organizational assimilation. In this study, articulated dissent was conceptualized as a type of dissent.

Design/methodology/approach – A questionnaire was distributed to 370 working adults in the USA via Qualtrics. The questionnaire measured five face concerns, namely, self, other and mutual-face, articulated dissent and organizational assimilation. Before hypothesis testing, each measure was subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the hypothesized factor structure held. Pearson correlation and ordinary least squares estimation were used to test the hypotheses.

Findings – Conceptualizing dissent as a type of conflict, the findings of the current study are as follows: self-face and assimilation are positively correlated, other-face and assimilation are positively correlated, mutual-face and assimilation are positively correlated, assimilation and articulated dissent are positively correlated and organizational assimilation mediated the relationship between mutual-face and articulated dissent.

Research limitations/implications – Theoretically, the self-presentation process (face) is more critical as a person becomes part of an organization; it is through assimilating into an organization that members become familiar with the norms of an organization and more comfortable dissenting to their superiors (articulated dissent) and the more the authors integrate with the work colleagues the more the authors engage in mutual face-saving.

Practical implications – The results of this study demonstrate that self-presentation is critical

as a person becomes part of an organization, particularly when it comes to managing conflict. Originality/value – This is the first study to link facework with organizational dissent. The results add to the understanding of how face affects whether we choose to express this kind of conflict behavior.

Keywords: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), Face negotiation theory, Dissent, Organizational assimilation, Facework

Introduction

The study of organizational communication is critical in an increasingly diverse and international workforce in which workplace conflicts, corporate scandals and a lack of trust in corporations and organizations abound. The studies have often used politeness (Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson, 1987a, 1987b) to explore unethical behaviors in organizations (Bisel et al., 2011; Bisel and Kramer, 2014; Ploeger et al., 2011; Valde and Miller Henningsen, 2015). Goffman (1967) defined face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular interaction" (p. 5). Brown and Levinson (1987a, 1987b) extended the concept of face with politeness theory, arguing the concept of face consists of two types of desire or face wants, which are attributed by the interactants to one another. The first, negative face, is the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions and the second, positive face, the need to be approved of by the other. Using this conceptualization of face, politeness theory explains how people respond to affronts to a person's face by face threatening acts. These face concerns operate on both an emotional and cognitive level. Face threatening acts will evoke emotional responses of various types and to varying degrees. How these emotional responses operate will depend on an individual's cognitive appraisal of the difference between how they expect to be treated and the actual treatment they receive. The level of discrepancy between these two will determine the facework they will enact in the communication encounte. (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

People voicing their dissent may be considered to be committing face threatening acts. The voicing of dissent occurs in many arenas including organizations. Organizational dissent refers to the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions concerning organizational policies and practices (Kassing, 1998). Investigations have explored how individuals express their dissent about organizational policies and decision-making (Avtgis et al., 2007; Croucher et al., 2018; Garner, 2013; Kassing, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2007; Kassing, 2001, Kassing and Armstrong, 2002; Sollitto and Myers, 2015). Organizational dissent refers to the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions concerning organizational policies and practices

(Kassing, 1998) (Brown and Levinson, 1978).

The underlying assumption of such research is that face is an explanatory mechanism for voice in an organizational setting. In particular, face as an explanatory mechanism for organizational dissent has not previously been tested. Previous studies have investigated face and the moral mum effect (Bisel et al., 2011; Bisel and Kramer, 2014; Ploeger et al., 2011) and dissent research has eluded to the influence of face on the dissent process (Kassing, 2001). Zeng (2018) asserted that dissent is often perceived by its audience as a conflict inducing form of communication. As face has been extensively linked with numerous forms of conflict communication (Ting-Toomey, 2005), face may further explain this particular form of communication. This study tests the assumption that face is an explanatory mechanism for proclivity for organizational dissent. In particular, this study:

- examines how face concerns explain articulated or upward dissent within an organization; and

- to what extent an individual's level of assimilation into an organization impacts face concerns and dissent behaviors.

Organizational dissent

Organizational dissent is a subset of employee voice (Kassing, 2011). One of the earliest theories of how employees may deal with workplace frustrations is Hirschman's (1970) Exit-Voice-Loyalty, where employees have two choices – leave the organization or voice their frustrations. Farrell (1983) challenged the idea that exit and voice were the only options because some employees may choose to reduce the amount of effort in an organization. Farrell labeled such behavior "neglect." Therefore, there are three mutually inclusive characteristics of dissent, voice, neglect and exit (Kassing, 1997).

Organizational dissent refers to "expressing disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational practices, policies and operations" (Kassing, 1998, p. 183), where the precipitation stage is hidden conflicts (Zeng, 2018). Conflict occurs "when an individual or group perceives differences and opposition between oneself and another individual or group about interest, beliefs

or values that matter to them" (De Dreu et al., 2000, p. 8). Conflict and dissent are interconnected conceptually (Zeng, 2018). First, organizational dissent is the expression of hidden conflicts. It is often triggered from a member's failure to identify fully with organizations. When the amount of dissatisfaction exceeds a member's tolerance, their work concerns might surface (Kassing, 1997). Second, organizational dissent is a less serious form of workplace conflict, which is manifested in three ways, namely, disagreements, disputes and litigation including serious and costly lawsuits and charges. Organizational dissent includes voiced opinions surrounding workplace concerns. Thus, dissent is mainly associated with disagreements and disputes, less serious and costly than litigation (Zeng, 2018). Third, "dissent and conflict together serve as an indication of the level of democracy in a workplace. The absence of conflict and dissent in an organization is usually a worrying sign" (Zeng, 2018, p. 74), indicating suppressed voice to problems and controversial issues, even severe misconduct, such as workplace bullying and harassment. A workplace environment that has a higher acceptance of power imbalances and aggressiveness fosters the occurrence of workplace bullying because perpetrators perceive less cost from their behaviors (Branch et al., 2013). To create a conflict-positive environment, it is crucial to invite self-expression (Tjosvold, 1991), especially disagreements concerning workplaces.

An organizational dissent is an important form of organizational and workplace communication because employees can give valuable feedback regarding organizational inefficiency, employee discontent, unethical practices, workplace conflict and other organizational aspects (Garner, 2016). Thus, dissent provides organizations opportunities for improvement and innovation (Croucher et al., 2018; Graham, 1986). For many organizational members, dissent is seen as benefitting organizations and members. However, many organizations penalize employees for expressing dissent (Garner, 2011; Waldron and Kassing, 2011) because they perceive the expression of dissent as a form of conflict to harm organizational harmony and "collective good" (Zeng, 2018) and thus dissent is seen as an aggressive, antagonistic and destructive form of communication. Furthermore, not all organizations are ready to recognize and respond to employees' dissent. Because of the benefits and potential challenges

of dissent, this communication activity has garnered much attention from scholars challenging the traditional view that "management knows best" in the past 20 years (Kassing, 2011).

When employees choose to express their dissatisfaction and contradictory opinions concerning their workplaces, they are exposing conflicts with related organizational members. As expressing dissent is risky in terms of retaliation, they need to choose their audience carefully. Their audience can be their managers, family members, friends, etc. If they decide to have open and direct communication to influential organizational members, such as management, it is referred as articulated dissent (Kassing, 1997). Articulated dissent has received extensive attention in research because this form of dissent has a direct impact on the superior/subordinate relationship. The extent to which an organizational member feels comfortable expressing themselves to their superior(s) says a lot about the culture of an organization (Kassing, 2011). Furthermore, how members communicate their dissent to superiors has been shown to vary significantly depending on a variety of individual, organizational and relational factors. Employees who have higher levels of argumentativeness, higher internal locus of control, higher organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), lower levels of verbally aggressiveness, a higher position in the organization or longer organizational tenure appear to use more articulated dissent (Croucher et al., 2009; Kassing and Avtgis, 2001; Payne, 2007). Employees who perceive more organizational justice, workplace freedom of speech, organizational democracy and organizational climate also tend to choose articulated dissent more (Kassing, 2000), while higher levels of burnout relate to lower levels of articulated dissent (Avtgis et al., 2007). When employees perceive a higher quality of superior-subordinate relationship, a higher level of trust in supervisors or a greater involvement in organizational decision-making, they are also more likely to express articulated dissent (Payne, 2014; Turnage and Goodboy, 2016).

As articulated dissent introduces potential face threat to the relationship, employees must take account of face threat when they consider dissenting (Kassing, 2005). Research identified a range of strategies employees choose, from less face threatening and more competent strategies, such as direct-factual appeal and solution presentation, where mutual face needs are protected, to

significant face threat and less competent strategies, where the supervisor's face is ignored while the employee's self-face want is explicitly displaced, including circumvention to threatening resignation (Kassing, 2005). Kassing (2001) also suggested employees engage in self-control in dissent, to protect their face. Furthermore, Croucher et al. (2013) asserted social desirability bias is embedded in employees' report of their dissent expression. Individuals attempt to monitor the perception they form of themselves by altering their behaviors and actions to appear more positive to others, particularly their supervisors. However, as illustrated below the correct choice of dissent strategy will be affected by the employee's level of assimilation in an organization.

Organizational assimilation

Organizational assimilation is the "processes by which individuals become integrated into the culture of an organization" (Jablin, 2001, p. 755), which involves three stages, namely, anticipatory socialization, the encounter stage and the metamorphosis stage (Jablin, 2001). Assimilation consists of seven dimensions: recognition, job competency, role negotiation, "familiarity with coworkers", "familiarity with supervisors", acculturation and involvement (Myers and Oetzel, 2003). The first five dimensions were positively related to upward dissent, while the last two dimensions were negatively related to latent dissent (Goldman and Myers, 2015). However, research has found organizational assimilation is significantly positively related to the frequency of upward dissent (Croucher et al., 2019; Kassing, 1997), implying more assimilated members in an organization are more likely to have better understanding of norms and attitudes of expressing dissent in organizations. Such organizational members tend to be more informative and reflective of previous dissent cases of other organizational members (Croucher et al., 2019). Thus, they become more strategic in choosing upward dissent strategies in terms of face mitigation and competency.

Additionally, members who are more assimilated are more likely to have higher levels of job satisfaction, higher levels of organizational identification and engagement, higher quality communication with their supervisors and express more articulated dissent in workplaces

(Gailliard et al., 2010; Goldman and Myers, 2015). When members articulate more upward dissent, referring to expressed disagreement or contradictory opinions toward organizational policies, operations and practices to the management, such dissent can imply conflicts with related organizational members and face threats to supervisors. Therefore, more assimilated individuals will express dissent in a manner that takes greater account of the face needs of others. Thus, it can be said they engage in facework more supportive of the face of others, than less assimilated individuals. The concepts of face, facework and face negotiation theory and their relationship to organizational dissent are now reviewed.

Face negotiation theory

Face negotiation theory (FNT) (Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2005; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998) explains variations in face and facework. Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) defined face as the claimed sense of positive social worth. Facework includes the communicative strategies we use to enact self-face or strategies we use to challenge, support or uphold another person's face (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Oetzel et al. (2001) summarized the main argument of FNT as:

(1) People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations.

(2) The concept of "face" is especially problematic in uncertain situations (e.g. conflict situations) when the situated identities of the communicators are called into question.

(3) Cultural variability, individual-level variables and situational variables influence cultural members'selection of face concerns over others.

(4) Subsequently, cultural variability, individual-level variables and situational variables influence the use of various facework and conflict strategies in intergroup and interpersonal encounters (p. 238).

FNT stresses three face concerns, namely, self, other and mutual-face. Self-face is concern for one's own image. Other-face is concern for another's image. Mutual-face is concern for the image of the relationship or concern for both parties' images (Ting-Toomey,

2005). The current version of FNT has 24 propositions focusing on the cultural, individual and situational levels (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Cultural level-propositions (1-12) accentuate differences between how members of collectivistic and individualistic cultures select or prefer face-concerns. Individual-level propositions (13-22) center on comparing how perceptions of self (e.g. independent or interdependent) relate to face-concerns and/or conflict styles. Situational-level propositions (23-24) compare differences between individualistic and collectivistic personalities regarding their facework behaviors toward ingroups and outgroups in conflict situations.

Propositions 23 and 24 are key to the current study. P23 states that more independent individuals will tend to express more self-face maintenance concerns and less other-face maintenance concerns when managing ingroup and outgroup conflict situations. P24 states that at an individual level, more interdependent individuals will tend to express more other- face concerns with ingroup members and higher self-face concerns with outgroup members in intergroup conflict situations (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Zeng (2018) argued that dissenters and dissent audiences can perceive dissenting as a conflict situation. In particular, articulated dissent is a situation in which a dissenter is more likely to fear their message(s) might be perceived as adversarial. Moreover, organizational members who have higher independent self-construal tend to express their opinion more to superiors because such messages can be interpreted as forms of image management and/or self-promotion (Croucher et al., 2014; Zeng, 2018).

The extent to which an individual is socialized into an organization has also been shown to influence how they interpret organizational messages, respond to stimuli within the organization and interact with other organizational members, particularly supervisors. It is through assimilation that members become more familiar with the rules and norms of an organization (Jablin, 2001; Kramer and Miller, 1999; Myers, 2005; Myers and Oetzel, 2003). It is also through assimilation that members learn how that particular organization handles conflict situations (Choudrie, 2005; Jablin, 2001; Yang, 2008). Members attain a level of not only competency in the organization but also learn from others how to and not to act/ communicate in the organization. Barge and Schlueter (2004) identified different categories of organizational

messages that members learn during the assimilation process. In particular, members learn eight discursive messages that form how they communicate within the organization. Five of those discursive formations may influence how members dissent in the organization:

(1) what it means to be professional;

(2) formal and informal expectations and rules;

(3) the values of a strong work ethic;

(4) the significance of organizational politics; and

(5) the importance of giving input and communicating openly.

Hypotheses

A primary assumption of FNT is that face is an explanatory mechanism between cultural, individual and situational level variables and conflict situations (real or perceived). Zeng (2018) argued conflicts can be perceived by dissenters and the dissent audience in a dissenting situation. In this case, face concerns will be directly related to an individual's propensity to express dissent in an organization, as dissent is potentially a conflict inducing act. Moreover, in a superior/subordinate relationship, willingness to express disagreement (i.e. dissent) and the ways in which disagreement can be expressed are all related to self- presentation (Morand, 2000). Additionally, more assimilated individuals present themselves in social situations with organizational members more frequently, they more proactively interact with learning and adjustment in terms of self-presentation/regulating (Waldeck and Myers, 2007). However, when they are at home alone, self-presentation is not needed because social contexts do not exist. More assimilated individuals also tend to communicate in ways to protect their self-image and portray themselves as competent communicators (Jablin et al., 1994). Thus, individuals who have higher levels of assimilation seem more likely to have higher self-face want.

Individuals with higher levels of assimilation tend to have higher levels of organizational identification (Goldman and Myers, 2015; Waldeck and Myers, 2007). They are more familiar with and feel closer to others and may feel responsible for the other in the organization (Levinas,

1982). Moreover, individuals who are more assimilated into the organization are more likely to use direct questioning tactics. Direct tactics, as opposed to indirect tactics, demonstrate a sense of face security within an organization (Brown and Levinson, 1987a, 1987b; Miller and Jablin, 1991). Such face security shows the member has a grasp of competent communication within the organization and understand the importance of general face-saving within the organizational setting (Jablin et al., 1994; Miller, 1996). Thus, we suspect that more assimilated employees are more likely to have mutual face and other-face concern respectively.

Research has indicated that employees with stronger assimilation tend to use more articulated dissent (Croucher et al., 2019; Kassing, 1998), because they have closer relationships with their supervisors (Kassing, 2000; Payne, 2014; Turnage and Goodboy, 2016), and are more engaged in and identified with their organizations (Goldman and Myers, 2015). Thus, we put forward that assimilation positively relates to articulated dissent. Collectively, to explore the relationships between facework and organizational dissent, the following model is proposed in Figure 1:

Face concerns
and dissent

Figure 1.
Proposed model
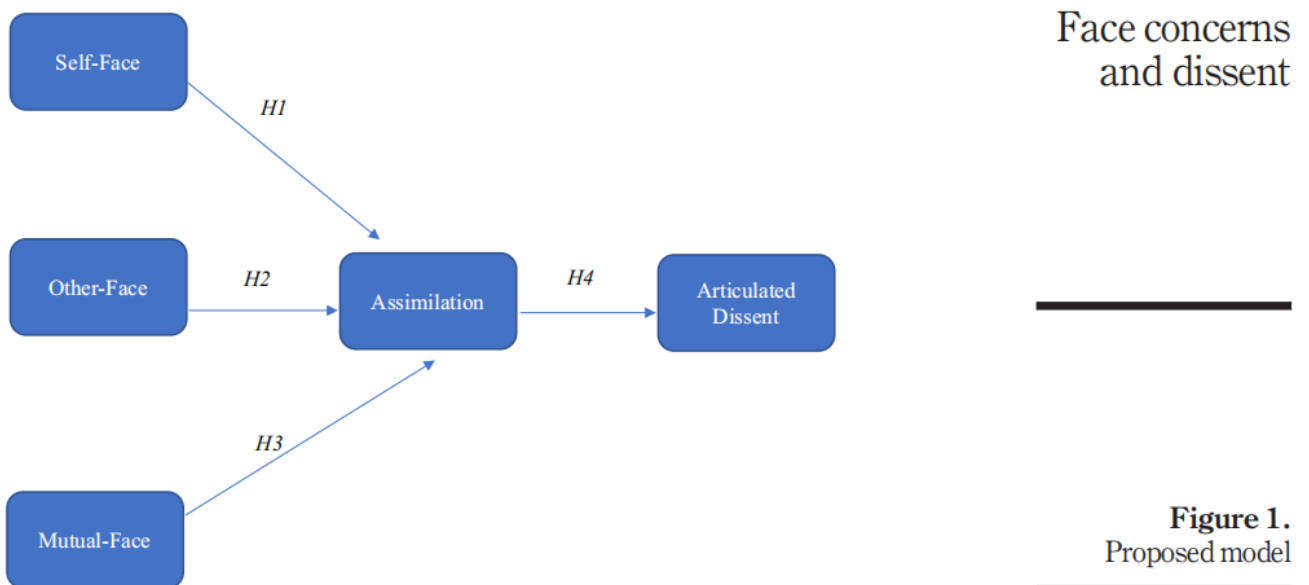
H1. Self-face will be positively related to assimilation.

H2. Other-face will be positively related to assimilation.

H3. Mutual-face will be positively related to assimilation.

H4. Assimilation will be positively related to articulated dissent.

These hypotheses combine to form the model depicted in Figure 1, which predicts that the face variables indirectly influence articulated dissent.

Method

To test the proposed model, a nonprobability sample of adults in the USA was collected (*n* = 370). Participants were contacted with the assistance of Qualtrics and requested to complete an online survey in 2018. Zack et al. (2019) asserted online nonprobability sampling tools such as Qualtrics provide useful information and improve our understanding of the social world. See Table 1 for a breakdown of demographic information. As the focus of this study was to explore the link between face and articulated dissent in organizations, participants who identified themselves as unemployed were not included in the final analysis (n = 14). Thus, the final sample size was n = 356. The survey instrument included the 6-item articulated dissent scale (Kassing, 2000), Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's (2001) revised 21-item face concerns scale, Myers and Oetzel's (2003) organizational assimilation index and a series of demographic questions. The median time for completion of the survey was 14 min. The appropriate ethical review board approved this study before data collection.

Organizational dissent scale

The six-item articulated dissent sub-scale (Kassing, 2000) measures how individuals verbally express contradictory opinions and disagreements about organizational policies, practices or operations. Respondents were asked to respond to the questions considering how they would express concerns at work. Items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree (Kassing, 2000). Sample items included "I share my criticism of this organization openly," and "I tell management when I believe employees are being treated unfairly" (Kassing, 2000).

Variable	*n*	M	SD
Sex			
Male	174		
Female	179		
Other	1		
Undisclosed	2		
Age		39.74	12.81
Tenure			
Less than a year	43		
1-3 years	88		
3-5 years	46		
5-10 years	65		
10-15 years	45		
15-25 years	39		
25+ years	22		
Education			
High school	97		
Associates or vocational	43		
Some college	70		
BA degree	87		
MA	40		
PhD or MD	7		
Less than high school	12		
Industry			
Finance	43		
Retail	32		
Manufacturing	75		
Medical	41		
Sales	17		
Tech/IT	44		
Tourism/food	26		
Administration	16		
Government	15		
Security	11		
Education	29		
Legal	7		
Organizational level			
Entry-level	82		
Mid-level	155		
Senior-management	88		
Other	31		

Table 1.

Demographic

Face concerns scale

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's (2001) face concerns scale includes 22-items that measure three types of face concerns, namely, self, other and mutual. Respondents were asked to consider each statement in response to a recent conflict they had in this particular study with a work colleague. The items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Sample items included "I was concerned with respectful treatment for both of us" and "Preserving our mutual self-images was important to me."

Organizational assimilation index

Myers and Oetzel's (2003) organizational assimilation index has 20-items that measure 6 distinct aspects of organizational assimilation, namely, familiarity with supervisors, organizational acculturation, recognition, involvement, job competency and role negotiation. While each dimension may be coded separately, Myers and Oetzel (2003) noted the dimensions may be combined for a universal measure of organizational assimilation. Respondents were asked to respond to the statements regarding the extent to which they feel a part of their organization. In the current study, "organization" was their employer. The items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Sample items included "I feel like I know my supervisor well" and "I feel involved in the organization."

Results

Before hypothesis testing, each measure was subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the hypothesized factor structure held. The fit statistics for each measure are displayed in Table 2. Each measure had acceptable fit statistics across the goodness of fit index (GFI) (≥ 0.90), comparative fit index (CFI) (≥ 0.90) and standard root mean square residual (SRMR) (≤ 0.08) (Bryne, 2016). Root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) was elevated for other-face and articulated dissent beyond

what would constitute mediocre fit (<0.1). Because of this, the items composing the measures were examined for residual error. Both articulated dissent and other-face contained an item causing a statistically significant amount of residual error across other items in the same measure. After these single items were removed, the RMSEA fell within the range of mediocre fit. Therefore, the re-specified measures were used for hypothesis testing and model testing. Descriptive statistics for the measures used in hypothesis and model testing are displayed in Table 3 and factor loadings are displayed in Table 4.

Variable	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	χ^2
Original					
Articulated dissent	0.95	0.95	0.12	0.05	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 9) = 53.74, p < 0.001$
Other-face	0.89	0.92	0.11	0.05	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 44) = 221.69, p < 0.001$
Mutual-face	0.98	0.98	0.12	0.03	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 2) = 12.92, p = 0.002$
Self-face	0.95	0.95	0.10	0.04	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 14) = 61.08, p < 0.001$
Assimilation	0.88	0.92	0.07	0.05	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 164) = 480.38, p < 0.001$
Refined					
Articulated dissent (−12)	0.98	0.98	0.09	0.03	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 5) = 19.91, p = 0.001$
Assimilation (−17)	0.90	0.93	0.07	0.05	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 164) = 388.71, p < 0.001$
Other-face (−5)	0.93	0.95	0.09	0.04	$\chi^2 (N = 356, 35) = 135.61, p < 0.001$

Table 2. Fit statistics

Variable	Min	Max	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Articulated dissent	1.00	5.00	2.98	1.00	0.34	−0.47	0.87
Self-face	1.00	5.00	3.52	0.77	−0.22	0.41	0.86
Other-face	1.00	5.00	3.53	0.80	−0.31	0.42	0.92
Mutual-face	1.00	5.00	3.89	0.81	−0.90	1.25	0.82
Assimilation	1.00	5.00	3.77	0.70	−0.41	0.41	0.93

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Factor				
Dissent 1	0.76			
Dissent 2	0.72			
Dissent 3	0.79			
Dissent 4	0.76			
Dissent 5	0.71			
Assimilation 1		0.85		
Assimilation 2		0.85		
Assimilation 3		0.73		
Assimilation 4		0.87		
Assimilation 5		0.89		
Assimilation 6		0.86		
Assimilation 7		0.70		
Assimilation 8		0.80		
Assimilation 9		0.81		
Assimilation 10		0.79		
Assimilation 11		0.72		
Assimilation 12		0.81		
Assimilation 13		0.75		
Assimilation 14		0.82		
Assimilation 15		0.84		
Assimilation 16		0.78		
Assimilation 17		0.71		
Assimilation 18		0.68		
Assimilation 19		0.73		
Assimilation 20		0.74		
Assimilation 21		0.68		
Assimilation 22		0.66		
Assimilation 23		0.64		
Assimilation 24		0.82		
Assimilation 25		0.78		
Mutual face 1			0.69	
Mutual Face 2			0.64	
Mutual face 3			0.82	
Mutual face 4			0.79	
Other-face 1				0.60
Other-face 2				0.73
Other-face 3				0.62
Other-face 4				0.75
Other-face 5				0.76
Other-face 6				0.73
Other-face 7				0.78
Other-face 8				0.78
Other-face 9				0.76
Other-face 10				0.79
Self-face 1					0.60
Self-face 2					0.76
Self-face 3					0.67
Self-face 4					0.64
Self-face 5					0.66
Self-face 6					0.70
Self-face 7					0.73

Table 4. Factor loadings

Hypothesis testing

The first hypothesis (H1) predicted a positive relationship between self-face and assimilation, which was supported by Pearson correlation (r = 0.46, p < 0.05). The second hypothesis (H2) predicted a positive relationship between other-face and assimilation, which was supported by Pearson correlation (r = 0.55, p < 0.05). The third hypothesis (H3) predicted a positive relationship between mutual-face and assimilation, which was supported by Pearson correlation (r = 0.55, p < 0.05). The final hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between assimilation and articulated dissent, which was supported by Pearson correlation (r = 0.23, p < 0.05). Uncorrected correlations are displayed in Table 5.

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Articulated dissent	–			
2. Self-face	0.47*			
3. Mutual-face	0.19*	0.56*		
4. Other-face	0.39*	0.66*	0.70*	
5. Assimilation	0.23*	0.47*	0.54*	0.55*

Note: *Correlation is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 5.
Correlation matrix

Model testing

Ordinary least squares estimation (OLS) is a conservative model testing technique that tests whether effects fit patterns of mediation (Boster, 2003). This method is more conservative than structural equation modeling (SEM) because it tests a model with uncorrected effects and effects corrected for attenuation due to measurement error, unlike SEM that uses only corrected effects (Kelly et al., 2015). This means mediation supported through OLS is less likely to be the result of Type 1 error than mediation tested through SEM (Boster, 2003; Kelly et al., 2015).

The model was first tested with uncorrected effects. OLS compares the predicted correlations between indirect relationships to those observed. If the predicted indirect effects are within sampling error of the observed indirect effects, then the effect patterns of the model are consistent with mediation. The uncorrected observed relationship between self- face and articulated dissent was r = 0.47 (0.39 < r < 0.55), which was beyond sampling error of the predicted relationships (r = 0.11). The uncorrected observed relationship between other-face and articulated dissent was r = 0.39 (0.30 < r < 0.47), which was beyond sampling error of the predicted

relationships (r = 0.13). The uncorrected observed relationship between mutual-face and articulated dissent was r = 0.19 (0.08 < r < 0.29), which was within sampling error of the predicted relationships (r = 0.12). As such, the uncorrected data supports a mediated path from mutual face to articulated dissent through the mediation of assimilation. The observed model is displayed in Figure 2.
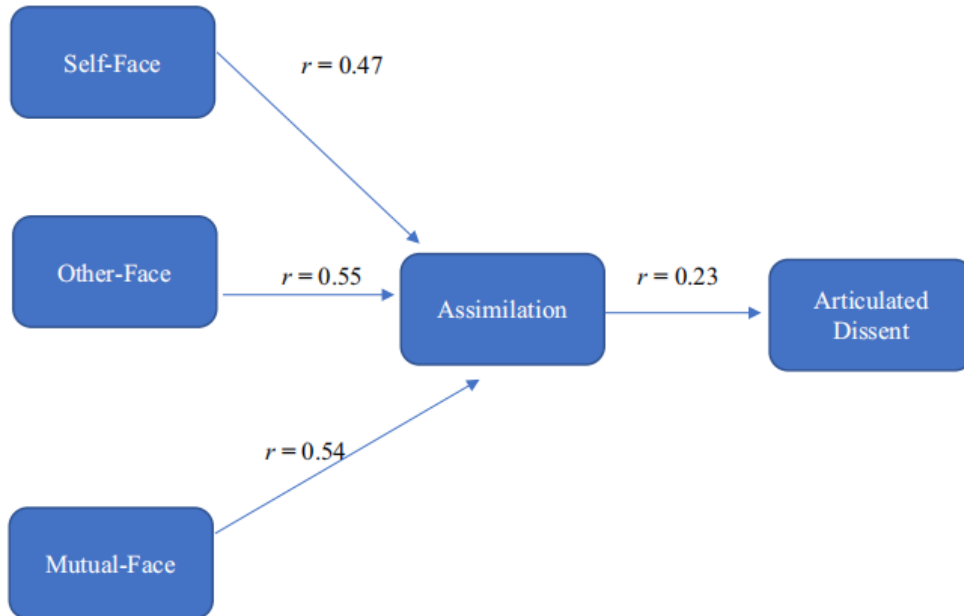

Figure 2.

Observed model

The model was then tested with corrected effects. The corrected relationship between self-face and articulated dissent was r = 0.54 (0.46 < r < 0.61), which was beyond sampling error of the predicted relationships (r = 0.14). The corrected relationship between other-face and articulated dissent was r = 0.44 (0.35 < r < 0.54), which was beyond sampling error of the predicted relationships (r = 0.16). The corrected relationship between mutual-face and articulated dissent was r = 0.22 (0.12 < r < 0.32), which was within sampling error of the predicted relationships (r = 0.16). Therefore, the corrected effects also support a mediated path between mutual-face and articulated dissent through the mediation of assimilation. In short, OLS through observed effects and effects corrected for attenuation due to measurement error support a mediated path from mutual-face to articulated dissent through the mediation of assimilation. The supported model is displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3.
Supported model

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationships among face concerns, articulated dissent and organizational assimilation. The findings of the study are:

Self-face is positively correlated with organizational assimilation.

Other-face is positively correlated with organizational assimilation.

Mutual-face is positively correlated with organizational assimilation.

Organizational assimilation is positively correlated with articulated dissent.

Organizational assimilation mediates the relationship between articulated dissent and mutual-face.

In the following section, the findings are discussed, implications and limitations are presented.

Face concerns and organizational assimilation

The H1 predicted that self-face is positively correlated with organizational assimilation. H2 predicted other-face is positively correlated with organizational assimilation. H3 predicted mutual-face is positively correlated with organizational assimilation. Each of these hypotheses was supported. These findings are consistent with the propositions of face negotiation theory and further our understanding of the organizational assimilation process. Our findings indicate more assimilated individuals more frequently have social presence where more self-presentation is enacted (Waldeck and Myers, 2007). Proximity and closeness to others increase both mutual- and other-face concern (Levinas,1982). The organizational assimilation process can be a conflict-ridden process (Gailliard et al., 2010;

Jablin, 2001). As individuals become more assimilated into the organizations, more independent individuals are more likely to express self-maintenance behaviors in conflict situations, while more interdependent individuals will express other/mutual maintenance behaviors (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Collectively, these results show that the self-presentation process (face) is more critical as a person becomes part of an organization.

Organizational assimilation and articulated dissent

H4 predicted organizational assimilation is positively correlated with articulated dissent. This hypothesis was supported. This result is consistent with the work of Croucher et al. (2014), Goldman and Myers (2015) and Zeng (2018). More upward dissent is expressed when employees identify strongly with the organization (Goldman and Myers, 2015) because they feel more comfortable and safer to express their opposed opinion to their management. It is through assimilating into an organization that members become familiar with the norms of an organization and more comfortable dissenting to their superiors (articulated dissent).

Face concerns and articulated dissent

The proposed model predicted that organizational assimilation would mediate the relationship between face concerns (self, other and mutual-face) and articulated dissent. The model was partially supported, with organizational assimilation influencing the relationship between mutual-face and articulated dissent. This result can be explained by how individuals transition through the assimilation process. Organizational members cannot engage in face saving behaviors in Jablin's (2001) first stage of assimilation, anticipatory socialization, as they have yet to meet or engage with others working in the organization. As a person enters the organization, Jablin's stage of encounter, they are unlikely to articulate their dissent as they are still coming to understand the particular cultural rules, written and unwritten, of the organization and they may also still be trying to make a good impression or meeting their positive face needs. When entering an organization as a new employee, incumbent members of the organization are at this point unknown or another. As the new employee moves from the stage of encounter to metamorphosis, the social distance or proximity between the preexisting employees or others, and themselves decreases. According to Levinas (1982) our

proximity to the other makes us responsible for them. Therefore, the more we come to know and integrate with our work colleagues the more likely we are to take responsibility for them by engaging in mutual face-saving behaviors when articulating our dissent.

Implications, future directions and limitations

The findings of this study expand our understanding of articulated dissent and face negotiation theory. A critical theoretical link in face negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005) is the relationship between face concerns and conflict, operationalized as articulated dissent in this study. The current study supported Propositions 23 and 24 of face negotiation theory by demonstrating that independent individuals express more self-face in conflict, and/or dissenting situations (Proposition 23); interdependent individuals express more other/ mutual-face in conflict or dissent situations (Proposition 24) with outgroup members. Our findings extend conflict and dissent theories by taking account of antecedent (face concern) and indirect factor (assimilation) for the first time. Face-negotiation theory provides a new approach to explain both organizational assimilation and dissent processes.

Based on those findings, there are several practical recommendations for practitioners to facilitate healthy workplaces in the perspective of constructive conflict and proactive employee management. First, prior dissent and conflict research in this area has focused mainly on creating a democratic mechanism for employees (Kassing, 2005), while our Face concerns and dissent findings urge both employees and managers to proactively develop competent conflicting resolution and dissent strategies by integrating face concerns. Specifically, they need to have a good understanding of their own face needs and the conflicted party's face needs to develop facework negotiation competency in conflicts and conflicted acts, dissent (Ting Toomey, 2005). When face threat is mitigated in dissenting, conflicted partners are more willing to respect and develop collaborate relationship with each other (Wong et al., 2015). Thus, employees can get constructive response and support from management to correct organizational misconducts. In turn, employees perceive more organizational justice, have more trust in their corporations and are less likely to express destructive displaced dissent,

such as whistleblowing.

Second, considering constructive dissent can be used to reduce the detrimental consequences of conflicts and facilitate constructive conflict (Zeng, 2018), managers should identify ways to create conflict positive workplaces for employees (Kassing, 2008). The present study recommends managers should identify employees' different face concerns to encourage dissent. Face concerns can be addressed by observing conflict styles and strategies (Oetzel et al., 2008). Managers can improve their organizations' responses to employees' face concerns through increasing awareness and knowledge of conflict management styles and tactics. For example, if employees use a dominating conflict style or confrontational and defending tactics in conflict situations, they are likely to be concerned with self-face. If employees display avoiding, integrating and compromising conflict styles, they favor mutual or other-face concerns (Oetzel et al., 2003). If they defend, and are aggressive in conflicts, they are more likely to be concerned with self-face. If they remain calm, apologize, discuss matters privately, favor problem-solving and respect, they favor mutual-face concerns. If they tend to pretend, give in and invite the third party in conflicts, they favor other-face over other-face concerns (Oetzel et al., 2008).

Third, the findings extended our understanding of the relationship between assimilation and articulated dissent (Croucher et al., 2019; Goldman and Myers, 2015) by adding mutual face concern as the antecedent. The results suggest employees who have mutual-face concern are more likely to express articulated dissent through assimilation. As they become more assimilated into their organizations, they are more likely to feel comfortable and competent to vent their dissent to their management strategically by confirming both conflicted parties' images. Empirically, the findings can help management predict which employees are potential articulated dissenters where they could know hidden conflicts and resolve them within the organizations.

Future research should continue to explore the relationships between how voicing dissent relates to a person's self-image (face). Future research should also explore the

discursive functions/ways of communicating new members are taught while assimilating into an organization. These ways of communicating clearly influence how members see themselves within the organization and how they communicate upward within the organization. Discursive functions such as:

what it means to be professional;

formal and informal expectations and rules;

the significance of organizational politics; and

the importance of giving input and communicating openly should be considered in connection to dissent and face.

The sample while balanced in a number of ways was limited to the USA and a replication of the study using an international sample could yield different results and this is an area for future research. Further research using in-depth interviews might illustrate individuals' motivations and beliefs concerning their willingness or unwillingness to dissent, as well as their thinking towards others when they choose to voice their dissent. Moreover, as facework research has suggested individuals more concerned with mutual-face are more likely to engage in mutual facework strategies, while self facework strategies are used more in outgroup conflicts (Ting-Toomey, 2005), future study should investigate if employees' identity as ingroup or outgroup members influences their facework strategies in dissent.

Dissent also occurs on social media, not only in face to face communication. Future research should investigate the role of face concerns in online dissent and compare individuals' tendency to dissent online and/or in face to face communication. This study was limited in that there was elevated RMSEA observed in the mutual face measure that could not be removed before conducting the analyses. Additionally, the assimilation measure had a slightly low GFI, which could not be accounted for by residual error. This means the supported model was confirmed using measures that show minor misfit. As such, scholars should replicate this study. Replication allows scholars to parse out whether misfit is a phenomenon caused by a moderator within this sample or a measurement error that needs to be addressed by the field at large (McEwan et al., 2018). Also, this study was limited in relying on self-reported surveys to measure face concerns, where

respondents were asked about a recent conflict situation. Thus, it is possible what they recall was not what actually happened because of memory inaccuracy or social desirability concern. One way to solve the potential problem could be by adding self construal because it has been found to have an effect on face concerns with independence being positively related to self-face concerns and interdependence associated positively with mutual-and other-face concerns (Oetzel et al., 2001).

In sum, the current study offers a step toward understanding the relationships among face concerns and organizational dissent. The findings demonstrate the theoretical link between face negotiation theory and organizational dissent. Assimilation also explains the nature of the relationship between mutual-face concern and articulated dissent. It is our belief that future research will further clarify the links between face and dissent and add even more clarity to how our self-image influences our propensity to assimilate and express ourselves in organizations.

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4.2 Article II

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GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the candidate and the candidate's Primary Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of candidate:	Hui Chen
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In which chapter is the manuscript /published work:	

Please select one of the following three options:

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Online anxiety and virtual organizational dissent: An affordance approach to effects of online communication apprehension and digital technology apprehension

Abstract

This study used online media affordance as the theoretical framework to examine the effect of two forms of online anxiety, online communication apprehension and digital technology apprehension, on employees' virtual organizational dissent. The effect of age, technical skills,the portion of workload done virtually, and previous experience in virtual teamwork were included in the study as control variables. Using factorial analysis and structural equation modelling, results from 321 volunteer employees of various US organizations (males = 135, females = 184, others = 2) were analyzed. The study showed that online communication apprehension and technical skills increased virtual articulated dissent at the significance levelof $p < 0.1$. Digital technology apprehension significantly increased both forms of dissent. Higher age significantly decreased virtual latent dissent.

Lay Summary:

This study investigated the effect of two forms of anxiety people may endure during online communication on their tendency to express their dissatisfaction, i.e., dissent, in virtual organizational interactions. The study showed that online communication apprehension, one's anxiety of communicating online, and digital technology apprehension, one's anxiety of working with digital devices increase online dissent to both the colleagues, and to the management. The study reasons that the possibilities created by online communication create enough cognitive and affective encouragement for the employees to express their online dissent. Also, the study showed that people with higher technical skills are more likely to dissent, and younger employees make more dissent to their colleagues. Finally, the study showed that the amount of dissent is not related to one's previous experience in online organizational experience or the portion of duties carried out online.

Keywords: online communication apprehension, computer anxiety, affordance,organizational dissent, structural equation modeling

Online anxiety and virtual organizational dissent: An affordance approach to effects of online communication apprehension and digital technology apprehension

Online communication and the increased engagement in virtual teams raise various types of workplace tensions, such as the employee need for autonomy, inclusion and power in organizations (Gibbs, 2009). Employees' reactions to these tensions can emerge in the form of online dissent, which refers to the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions over organizational policies, operations, and practices in an online setting (Kassing, 1997). Compared to its offline (face-to-face) form, in addition to interpersonal communication competencies, online dissent also requires a level of technical skills to understand and utilize digital devices to express resentment and dissatisfaction. As dissenting can fundamentally be a conflictive and stressful process (Zeng et al., 2020), employees' decision to dissent is likelyto be affected by the level of anxiety they feel and endure due to an occurring or prospective organizational dissent. This study is looking at the understudied impacts of two forms of online anxiety, namely Online Communication Apprehension (OCA) and Digital Technology Apprehension (DTA), on employees' Virtual Organizational Dissent (VOD).

The affordance framework could explain the variation in the outcomes of the technology use. First introduced in ecological psychology to explain how living beings interact with the possibilities in their immediate environment (Gibson, 1979). Affordance bridges the material and relational perspectives of using technology to explain the societal implications and outcome variations (Norman, 2011). The material aspect is related to the external manifestation and technical aspects of a technology device, and the relational aspect speaks to how different individuals engage with technology based on their unique backgrounds and characteristics (Faraj & Azad, 2012). Engaging with technology affordancesis a cognitive process that could be affected by individuals' psychological and social characteristics (Vishwanath, 2016). Previous research also showed that anxiety has affective and cognitive impacts that influence the outcomes of implementing technology affordances(Nagy & Neff, 2015). For example, anxiety could affect metavoicing and its consequent presence or lack of expressing dissent and dissatisfaction in online organizational communication. Metavoicing, the ability to get engaged

in online reactions to others' activities, is an online technology affordance (Majchrzak et al., 2013).

However, the previous investigations of anxiety in organizational communication have approached the concept in the broader sense of various negative emotions such as angerand frustration (Barki & Hartwick, 2001). To better understand the dynamics of anxiety in organizational communication, it is essential to distinguish among the various types of anxiety, such as OCA and DTA and their effects on communication. OCA, or the communication apprehension in online interactions (Hunt et al., 2012), reduces individuals' online participation and effectiveness (Fuller et al., 2016). DTA, commonly known as computer anxiety, is considered as an avoidance emotion derived from expecting unsatisfactory outcomes of technology use (Burns et al., 2019) and is associated with a lowerintention to use technology and perceived ease of technology use (Celik & Yesilyurt, 2013; Chuo et al., 2011), lower digital skills (Parayitam et al., 2010; Schlebusch, 2018) and lower job and career satisfaction (Parayitam et al., 2010). As expressing dissent in online organizational communication necessitates material engagement with the technology and could be based on the individual preferences and characteristics, understanding the impact of OCA and DTA on OVD could help with the theoretical development of the understudied field of organizational dissent in the online sphere. Furthermore, this paper responds to the previous calls for investigating the behavioral and cognitive changes technology bear to individuals' information sharing across the organizations (Fuller et al., 2016; Majchrzak et al., 2013).

Affordances of online organizational communication

Affordances are continuums of the potentials and possibilities provided by an environment or a device with which one engages based on one's characteristics and preferences (Vishwanath, 2016). Davis and Chouinard (2016) conceptualized the mechanism of affordance function through the gradated continuums of *requiring* or *demanding* the users to act in a specific way, *encouraging* them to and *discouraging* them from acting in a particular way over other possible actions and refusing them to access specific action(s). An important advantage of affordance is its focus on the subjective agency of users beyond their mere technological efficacy (Davis & Chouinard, 2016).

Previous studies have mentioned different affordances for online technology in organizations. Evans et al. (2017) listed *anonymity*, the ability to keep the source of communication unknown and unspecified, *persistence*, the ability to preserve information in the same original form of production, *visibility*, the ability to reveal or conceal information, *editability*, the subsequent possibility of editing one's produced content, and *association*, the possibility of the relationship among the individuals, or the possibility of mutual contribution to content production in online communication. In organizational communication, Majchrzak et al. (2013) mentioned *metavoicing,* the ability to get engaged in online reactions to others' activities, *triggered attending*, the ability to pick a timely reaction to the content of interest and ignoring other contents, *network-informed associating*, a specified organizational definition of association, and generative role-taking, the ability to take emergent actions to facilitate organizational dialogue and knowledge sharing.

Previous studies of organizational communication have extensively used the affordance framework. Majchrzak et al. (2013) used affordance to explain the change in organizational communication from an online exchange of information to a continuous

communal conversation of knowledge sharing. They showed that contextualization of the aforementioned affordances could lead to positive or negative outcomes. Other studies used affordance to explain mobile knowledge workers' establishment of social relationships within and across different organizations (Nelson et al., 2017), decision-making among police forces (Verhulst & Rutkowski, 2018), the difference between social media in organizations and non-organizational computer-mediated communication (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Treem and Leonardi (2013) used affordances mentioned in Evans et al. (2017) to explain the organizational power relationships, organizational knowledge sharing and organizational socialization process.

Online organizational dissent

Employees may voice organizational dissent to convey their contradictory opinions over organizational policies, operations, and practices (Kassing, 1997). Despite employee dissatisfaction being commonplace in the workplace, dissent may remain unexpressed because it is often met with negligence or even retaliation. In a traditional setting, employees may express open and direct communication to the management (articulated dissent), share their frustrations with coworkers (latent dissent), or vent work-related issues to their friends and family outside of the organization (displaced dissent). With the continually increasing use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media (SM), individuals may voice their concerns about their organizations in an online setting. The anonymity afforded bythe CMC allows individuals to skirt potential retaliations when expressing their uncensored opinions (Kassing, 2011). Thus, the employees may feel more encouraged to "voice their concerns on their organizations with reduced fear of retribution" in the online environment (Gosset & Kilker, 2006, p. 63).

While expressing online dissent becomes an emerging phenomenon in the contemporary digital environment, few studies have examined online dissent processes and

audiences (Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2018). To date, most dissent studies have been carried out to explore face-to-face interactions, focusing on determinants of dissent decisions and recipients. The CMC competence entails skills often not present in a face-to-face setting. Thiscould be especially true in the case of dissent expression, as this type of communication is confrontational in nature. One goal of this study is to clarify factors that influence employees'online decision making about their dissent strategy.

Anxiety and organizational dissent

Due to its confrontational nature that challenges the organizational status quo, dissent is a stressful process (de Dreu et al., 2000; Zeng et al., 2020). Bisel and Adame (2018)showed that when the managers value employees' embodied expertise, organizational moralized articulated dissent increases, and employees' anxiety decreases. Prior studies investigated the effect of stressful processes such as verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness on dissent. Kassing and Avtgis (1999) showed that argumentativeness increases articulated dissent but has no significant effect on latent dissent, and verbal aggressiveness decreases latent dissent and increases articulated dissent. According to Kassing and Avtgis (1999), the finding showed that employees perceived articulated dissent as a constructive process that included argument. Furthermore, they mentioned that when employees found fewer opportunities to voice their opinion, they dissented latently, which implies that a higher level of anxiety is more related to latent dissent.

Furthermore, the retrievability affordance, manifested in permanent retractability of online communication logs, could produce anxiety and affect dissenting strategies. Online dissent entails sharing private information, i.e. privacy boundaries, which according to Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory (Petronio, 2002), can lead to boundary turbulence once the commutation parties miscoordinate private information management. Previous studies implied an association between dissent and communication anxiety, particularly when expressed to managers (Bisel & Adame, 2018), but the effect of different types of anxiety such as communication apprehension on dissent is understudied (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999).

Online Communication Apprehension

Online communication apprehension (OCA), also known as computer-mediated communication apprehension (CMCA), is the apprehension one endures during a real or anticipated online communication (Hunt et al., 2012). Previous studies of OCA in educational context showed it weakens students' learning ability (Vician & Brown, 2001), lessen their use of email technology (Fuller et al., 2006), and is negatively correlated with positive attitudes toward online communication and communication competence (Brown et al., 2004).In online organizational communication, employees with high OCA are perceived to have lower performances (Fuller et al., 2016), and they are less likely to use new technologies, especially ones that involve more complicated skills (Scott & Timmerman, 2005).

The relationship between communication apprehension and dissent in the online context is understudied, but the previous research showed that organizational media afford socialization, information sharing and power relationships (Treem & Leonardi, 2013), which are necessary for dissenting yet could embed communication apprehension. Especially, managing power relations in dissent communication could create communication apprehension; thus, those with higher apprehension are more likely to avoid dissent. Also, organizational dissent could result in employee satisfaction (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2011) andemotional release and support (Sollitto & Myers, 2015). In this case, higher apprehension is likely to increase dissent as a means to manage distress and anxiety. As the previous findingsin this area yielded mixed findings, the following research questions are presented:

RQ1a: What is the impact of Online Communication Apprehension (OCA) on Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD)?

RQ1b: What is the impact of Online Communication Apprehension (OCA) on Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD)?

Digital Technology Apprehension

DTA is the anxiety of working with technology, affecting organizational behaviors, especially in online communication. Previous studies showed that new technologies could create resistance in organizations (Lee et al., 2019). DTA and other types of anxieties lessen the chance

of inclusion (Di Giacomo et al., 2019) and can limit thought-action repertoire and encourage avoid/escape behaviors (Burns et al., 2019) from the situations such as organizational dissent, which are highly dependent on cognitive processing (Nemeth, 1995). The influence of DTA on anxiety has not been studied before, however, similar to OCA, its effect could be twofold. While it is possible that DTA prevents engagement with technology and decrease various forms of online communication, includingonline dissent, it is also possible the cognitive and psychological need to dissent overcome the obstacles of DTA. Therefore, the following research questions are presented:

RQ2a: What is the impact of Digital Technology Apprehension (DTA) on Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD)?

RQ2b: What is the impact of Digital Technology Apprehension (DTA) on Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD)?

Control variables

This study also controls the effect of the employees' technical skills, age, virtual experience and amount of job done virtually VOD.

Technical Skills

The level of skill and comfort with technology significantly affects performance on simple and complex tasks in a computer-mediated environment (Taha et al., 2014). Additionally, limited experience in using online technology is a significant communication

barrier (Lyles et al., 2020). As online communication entails sufficient technical competence, we reason that higher technical skills can increase VOD. Therefore, the following are hypothesized:

H1a Higher technical skills increase Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD).

H1b Higher technical skills increase Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD).

Age

Previous studies showed that older employees are more likely to confront management or stand up in the organization, especially when they perceive a decision to be unfair (Kang & Berger, 2010). Furthermore, age could also be linked with employees' tendency to use technology. Older people tend to have a more difficult time using technology to complete tasks (Czaja et al, 2015; Tieu et al., 2017; Yen et al., 2018) and usually perform worse when completing the same task with technology (Lyles et al., 2020). Because of this, the following are hypothesized:

RQ3a: Age positively/negatively impacts Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD).

RQ3b: Age positively/negatively impacts Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD).

Online organizational experience

The analyses also included employees' virtual experiences and workload as controlled variables. Perceived self-efficacy is a key determinant of employee voice. In other words, employees who are confident in their online communication skills are more likely to express their opinions (Hastings & Payne, 2013). The fear of working with technology (DTA) is dependent on one's virtual experience, as those with extensive online experiences could be more competent in communicating their messages effectively and appropriately in an online setting. Thus, we hypothesize that virtual experience leads to increased online articulated dissent and latent dissent:

H2a: Higher virtual experience increases Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD).

H2b: Higher virtual experience increases Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD).

The portion of workload performed virtually

The portion of workload serves as an indication of physical work engagement. Those with heavier workloads are generally more involved in and committed to the work role. As past

research has indicated that organizational engagement and commitment are significantlyrelated to employee dissent behaviors in a face-to-face setting (Kassing et al., 2012), we hypothesize such relationship persists in a virtual setting too:

H3a: Higher virtual portion of workload increases Virtual Articulated Dissent (VAD).

H3b: Higher virtual portion of workload increases Virtual Latent Dissent (VLD).

Collectively, to explore the relationships between online anxiety and organizational dissent, the following model is proposed in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Theoretical study model
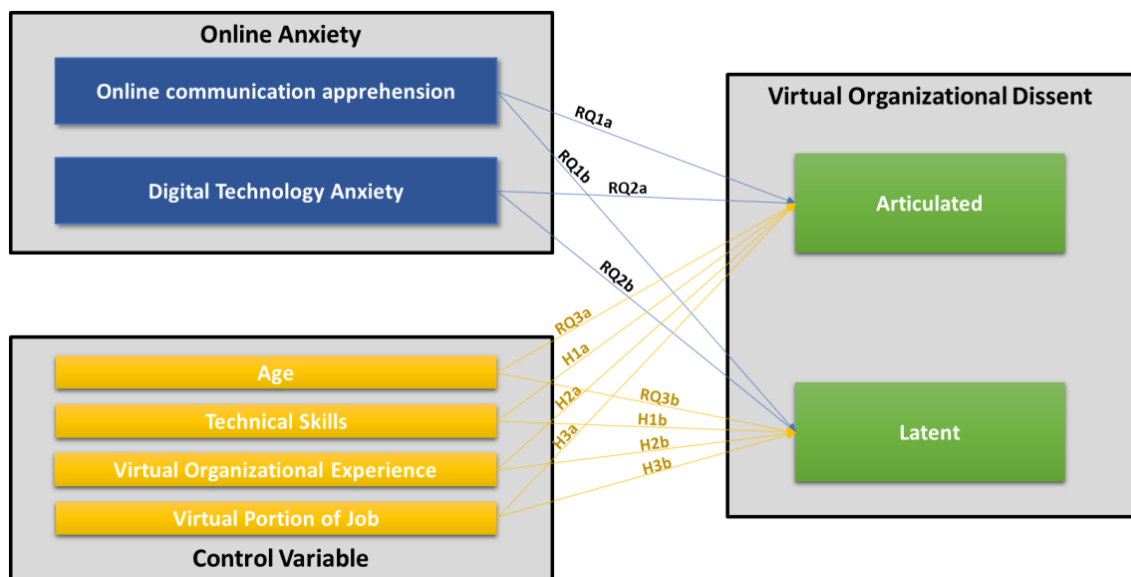
Method

Participants

Participants (N = 397) were volunteer employees of various US organizations (males = 165, females = 229, others = 3), recruited via a reputable international panel data company (Qualtrics) to fill out online survey questionnaires. Participants received financial incentives upon completing the questionnaire. The experience of working in a virtual team was the inclusion criteria. Upon screening the data, the participants with missed information and those retired or unemployed at the time of data collection were removed. As a result, 321 participants were retained for final analysis. The included participants (males = 135, females = 184, others = 2) ranged from 19 to 77 years old (M = 39.07, SD = 12.19). The detail of demographics and organizational information, including education, organization size, work sector, the length of virtual team experience, and the virtual portion of the participants' teamworkload, is presented

Table 1
Demographic information of participants

	No.	%		No.	%	Min	Max	M	SD
Gender			Virtual Team Experience (year)						
Female	184	57.3	Less than 1	59	18.4				
Male	135	42.1	1-2	84	26.2				
Other	2	.6	3-5	86	26.8				
Education			6-10	77	24				
No High School Diploma	4	1.2	more than 10	119	37.1				
High School Diploma	99	30.8	Portion of Virtual Team Work Load						
Bachelor	148	46.1	Small (0-19%)	67	20.9				
Master	60	18.7	Notable (20-40%)	86	26.8				
Doctorate	10	3.1	Medium (41-60%)	77	24				
Organization Size			Significant (61-80%)	57	17.8				
Less than 10	30	9.3	Major (81-100%)	34	10.6				
10-50	52	16.2	Age			19	77	39.07	12.19
51-100	59	18.4	19-29	67	20.9				
100-500	63	19.6	30-39	86	26.8				
More than 500	117	36.4	40-49	77	24				
Work Sector			50-59	57	17.8				
Finance and Management	34	10.6	60 and older	34	10.6				
Social and Public Services	109	34	Total (smaple)	321	100				
Art and Education	28	8.7							
Engineering and Sciences	40	12.5							
Information Technology	96	29.9							
Healthcare	14	4.4							

Measures

OCA was measured using eight items of the Measure of Online Communication Attitude (MOCA) developed by Ledbetter (2009), which is a Likert-type questionnaire ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. An example of the statements is "I feel awkward when communicating online".

DTA was measured using 8 items of the Computer Anxiety Scale (CAS) which is a Likert-type scale developed by Cohen and Waugh (1989), ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree with items like "I feel anxious whenever am using computers".

VOD was measured using 18 items of the Organizational Dissent Scale (ODS) developed by Kassing (1998). ODS has 24 items measuring dissent across three contexts of articulated, latent, and displaced dissent. Displaced dissent is not included in the current study because it is often considered as a non-organizational communication behavior (Croucher et al., 2014; Garner & Wargo, 2009; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002). All items are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranges from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Original sample items include "I do not question management" and "I speak freely with my coworkers about troubling workplace issues". As ODS was designed to measure dissent in a face-to-face setting, items were modified to study dissent in a virtual environment. For example, "I speak

freely with my coworkers about troubling workplace issues" was changed to "I speak freely with my coworkers in my virtual team about troubling workplace issues". The Pearson correlation, mean and standard deviation of the constructs are presented in table 2.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations and Two-Tailed Pearson Correlations

	N	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Online CA	321	2.60	1.45	1							
(2) DTA	321	1.97	1.14	.74**	1						
(3) VAD	321	3.89	1.27	.57**	.60**	1					
(4) VLD	321	3.24	1.10	.37**	.43**	.46**	1				
(5) Tech Skills	321	2.79	0.77	-.12*	-.14**	0.03	.21**	1			
(6) Virtual Portion	321	2.70	1.27	-0.06	0.03	0.06	.14*	.23**	1		
(7) Virtual Experience	321	2.78	1.26	-0.06	0.03	0.02	0.04	.21**	.25**	1	
(8) Age	321	39.07	12.19	-.21**	-.24**	-.18**	-.27**	0.01	-0.11	.25**	1

Note. **: $p < .01$, *: $p < .05$

Analysis

Measurement validation

To test the validity of the measurements, initially, a test of normality via calculation of skewness and kurtosis was performed using IM SPSS statistics 27, which did not exceed the ±2.2 threshold, demonstrating a normal distribution of data (Sposito et al., 1983). In the next step, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using IBM SPSS statistics 27 and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using IBM SPSS AMOS 27 were conducted to check the validity and relativity of the measurement. EFA with maximum likelihood extraction and Promax rotation (good of fitness: $\chi 2$ (373) = 701.86, p < .001; KMO and Bartlett: adequacy = .93, $\chi 2$ (528) = 7683.98, p < .001) yielded five factors with eigenvalues over 1 explaining the cumulative extraction of squared loading (amount = 62.6%). The description of sums of square loadings for each factor is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Structural factor loading matrix for study variable items after removing Confident DTA

Items	Factors					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
OCA1	0.89	-0.06	-0.01	-0.01	0.02	
OCA2 (R)	0.70	0.02	-0.01	0.09	-0.07	
OCA3	0.80	0.14	0.05	0.00	-0.04	
OCA4 (R)	0.82	-0.11	0.03	-0.01	0.04	
OCA5	0.86	0.07	0.03	-0.05	-0.01	
OCA6	0.75	-0.04	-0.03	0.02	0.03	
OCA7	0.80	0.10	-0.07	0.05	-0.01	
OCA8	0.77	0.09	-0.06	0.00	0.04	
DTA1 (R)	0.12	0.73	0.12	0.04	0.02	
DTA2	0.25	0.54	0.06	-0.11	-0.01	
DTA4	0.04	0.88	-0.03	-0.03	-0.05	
DTA5	0.03	0.80	0.03	0.01	-0.01	
DTA6	-0.09	0.88	0.00	0.04	-0.02	
DTA7	0.00	0.90	0.02	-0.02	-0.01	
DTA11	-0.01	0.54	-0.06	-0.09	0.09	
DTA12	-0.01	0.84	-0.02	0.04	0.02	
DTA14	-0.04	0.85	-0.07	0.01	0.01	
TechSkills1	0.02	0.09	0.73	0.02	-0.09	
TechSkills2 (R)	-0.22	0.05	0.71	-0.06	0.07	
TechSkills3	0.07	-0.04	0.85	-0.03	0.05	
TechSkills4	-0.09	-0.04	0.78	0.09	0.00	
TechSkills5	0.09	-0.10	0.78	0.03	0.02	
TechSkills6	0.08	0.00	0.80	-0.03	-0.05	
VLD2	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.61	0.17	
VLD6	0.05	-0.06	-0.01	0.71	0.10	
VLD7	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.88	-0.13	
VLD8	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	0.88	-0.04	
VLD11	-0.11	0.08	0.04	0.71	-0.02	
VAD1	0.05	0.16	0.04	0.05	0.65	
VAD4	-0.10	0.05	0.04	-0.13	0.79	
VAD5	-0.01	-0.09	-0.06	0.04	0.82	
VAD9	0.10	-0.05	-0.01	0.08	0.59	
VAD15	0.12	0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.53	
Sums of Square Loadings	4.05	11.30	2.06	1.73	1.54	
% Variance	12.26	34.23	6.23	5.23	4.65	62.6

Tests	Adequacy	Chi-Square	DF
KMO and Bartlett's Test	.93	7683.98***	528
Goodness-of-fit Test		701.86***	373

Note. ***: $p < .001$; (R): Item was later removed during CFA to establish the model fit

A follow-up CFA on the included items yielded excellent model fit: $\chi^2(367) = 684.198$, $p < .001$, CFI = .95, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .052, PClose = .29. Also, the reliability and convergent and discriminant validities of the adapted scale was measured. Cronbach α, Composite reliability, and maximum reliability (MaxR(H)) were calculated for each factor, and they were all higher than .7, showing strong reliability for the included constructs (Hair et al., 2014). Also, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV), square root of AVE, maximum likelihood estimation of inter- construct correlation, and HeteroTrait-MonoTrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations were calculated for the model. AVE was higher than .5, indicating acceptable convergent validity in the model (Hair et al., 2014). To meet the criteria for discriminant validity, at least one of the following conditions must be met: 1) MSV for each construct should be less than its correspondent AVE, 2) the square root of AVE for the construct should be higher than the inter-construct correlations for the construct, 3) the HTMT must be less than .85 (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler et al., 2015). All of the conditions for each construct were met, thus the model has discriminant validity. A summary of the model reliability, validities and invariance measurements can be found in Table 4.

Table 4
Validity and Invariance Measurements of the Study Models

	Model Invariance Tests						
	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	PClose
Latent Model (CFA)	684.198***	367	1.864	95	.05	.052	.29
Path Model (SEM)	798.761***	440	1.815	944	.52	.05	.437

	Construct Validity Measurements					& Constructs Correlations (Max. Likelihood)				
	α	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Online Communication Apprehension	.938	.939	.721	.497	.945					
2. Digital Technology Anxiety	.929	.932	.637	.497	.947	.705***				
3. Technical Skills	.888	.889	.617	.038	.894	-.112†	-.134*			
4. Virtual Latent Dissent	.875	.877	.588	.169	.886	.343***	.393***	.194**		
5. Virtual Articulated Dissent	.833	.832	.500	.296	.843	.518***	.544***	.025	.411***	

	HTMT Measurements				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Online Communication Apprehension	-				
2. Digital Technology Anxiety	.711	-			
3. Technical Skills	.105	.138	-		
4. Virtual Latent Dissent	.351	.392	.200	-	
5. Virtual Articulated Dissent	.508	.546	.019	.424	-

Note: CMIN: Minimum Discrepancy; DF: Degree of Freedom; CFI: Comparative Fit Index; SRMR: Standard Root Mean Square Residual; RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; PClose: Probability of Close fit; SQR: Square Root; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; α: Cronbach's Alpha; CR: Construct Reliability; MSV: Maximum Shared Variance; MaxR(H): Maximum Reliability; HeteroTrait-MonoTrait Ratio of Correlations; †: $p < 0.1$; *: $p < .05$; **: $p < .01$; ***: $p < .001$

Path Model Analysis.

A path model was created based on the propositions of the study. DTA and OCA as exogenous predictors, technical skills, age, portion of job done online and virtual organizational experience as exogenous controls and VAD and VLD as dependent variables were entered into

the model. The model showed acceptable fitness, $\chi^2(440) = 798.761$, p

< .001, CFI = .944, SRMR = .052, RMSEA = .05, PClose = .437. The standardized and

unstandardized regressions weights, probability estimations and effect sizes measured using the

Stats Tool Package (Gaskin, 2016) and are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Specific direct and indirect effects

Proposition	Research Finding	Effect	Unstandardized Estimate	Standardized Estimate	p	f^2 (Effect Size)	Effect Size Interpretation
RQ1a	Answered	OCA → VAD	0.255	0.276	<0.001	.05	Small
RQ1b	Answered	OCA → VLD	0.112	0.142	0.081	.14	Small
RQ2a	Answered	DTA → VAD	0.421	0.359	<0.001	.08	Small
RQ2b	Answered	DTA → VLD	0.282	0.282	0.001	.05	Small
H1a	Partially Supported	Tech Skills → VAD	0.169	0.1	0.087	.02	Small
H1b	Supported	Tech Skills → VLD	0.334	0.234	<0.001	.07	Small
RQ3a	Answered	Age → VAD	-0.002	-0.02	0.721	-	-
RQ3b	Answered	Age → VLD	-0.017	-0.18	0.002	.11	Small
H2a	Not Supported	Virtual Experience → VAD	-0.006	-0.005	0.928	-	-
H2b	Not Supported	Virtual Experience → VLD	0.012	0.013	0.821	-	-
H3a	Not Supported	Virtual Portion → VAD	0.042	0.039	0.48	-	-
H3b	Not Supported	Virtual Portion → VLD	0.056	0.061	0.279	-	-

Findings

Responding the first four RQs of the study, the research showed that anxiety in online

communication generally increased VOD. The result showed that OCA with a small effect

increased VAD (β = .255, p < .001, f^2= .05). The effect of OCA on VLD was only significant at p

<.10, however its effect size was considerable (β = .112, p = .081, f^2= .14). DTA with a small

size effect increased VAD (β = .421, p < .001, f^2= .08) and VLD (β = .282, p = .001, f^2= .05).

Among the control variables, technical skills increased VLD with a small effect (β

= .234, p < .001, f^2= .07) but its small size effect on VAD was only significant at p <.1 (β

= .1, p =.087, f^2= .02). Responding to *RQ3a* and *RQ3b*, the study showed that ageing

significantly decreased VLD with a small size effect (β = -.18, p = .002, f^2= .11). However, the

effect of ageing on VAD and the effects of other control variables on VAD and VLD was not

significant. Thus, *H2a* and *H2b*, *H3a*, *H3b* were not supported.

Discussion

This study investigated the effects of online anxiety on organizational dissent in the online sphere. The findings showed that generally online anxiety increases online organizational dissent. Specifically, the study showed that higher DTA increases both forms of organizational dissent, while OCA has a significant effect on VAD and a barely significanteffect on VLD. Technical skills were generally found to increase online organizational dissent, with a significant impact on VLD and an almost significant effect on VAD. Ageing was also shown to decrease VLD.

DTA positively predicts virtual organizational dissent. Communicating appropriately and effectively in an online setting can be challenging for those with high DTA. They worry that their constructive criticisms might be ignored or misconstrued may ultimately lead to the withdrawal of voice. More anxious individuals tend to minimize uncertainty by exerting more control over their environment (Gudykunst, 1995). Higher levels of DTA are correlated with higher neuroticism (Powell, 2013); thus those with higher DTA tend to be more nervous in social settings. As neuroticism is associated with feelings of worry (Beatty & Pascual-Ferrá, 2015), neurotic employees might pay more attention to trivial things and have a low tolerance for inadequate conducts. The different affordances provided by online organizational communication, such as metavoicing, enables the neurotic employees to establish/restore control in the workplace through latent or articulated dissenting. Previous studies showed that neuroticism could impact latent dissent in face-to-face interactions (Ötken & Cenkci, 2015). The relationship between DTA and online dissent may be contingent upon employee psychological traits, such that the positive relationship between DTA and VOD is stronger among employees who are high on neuroticism. Thus, future studies must explore the moderating role of neuroticism in the relationship between communication anxiety and organizational behaviors.

The study findings reveal that higher OCA leads to increased VAD and VLD. While individuals with higher OCA are more reluctant to engage in online communication, their willingness to communicate might change when it comes to principled dissent. Individuals who talk less might be more careful with and selective of their expressions. In other words, they

would approach communication only when it is deemed necessary. Thus, the individuals who normally avoid communication might actively seek to spread the message when their anxiety can be overridden, and the triggering agents exceed their threshold. This finding suggests that the CA might fail to predict individual communication behavior in a situation that involves moral reasoning, such as organizational dissent. Future studies are warranted tofurther test the applicability of trait-like characteristics in unusual situations.

Previous research indicated that extroverts generally have lower levels of communication apprehension and are more likely to engage in face-to-face communication than introverts (Goby, 2006). However, the tempo-spatial flexibility of online communicationallows individuals to believe they have more control over their messages, thereby reducing fear when engaging in online communication. As such, communication apprehension might be an entirely different concept in an online setting and must account for alternative factors, such as comfort with technology. For example, an introvert who has high levels of CA but is technology-savvy might be confident to approach communication in an online setting, even in a confrontational context such as organizational dissent. While the general positive impact of technical skills on VOD supports this theory, further study of the moderated effect of technical skills and self-efficacy on the relationship between OCA and VOD is needed.

Modern organizations are eager to adopt technology that facilitates workplace communication. The current study provides insights into the affordances in online organizational dissent. Employees may cognitively utilize online communication to share complaints with the management and their coworkers. Asynchronicity and editability afforded by online communication may allow employees to express their contradictory opinions more effectively and appropriately (Evans et al., 2017). The fact that employees with higher OCA are more likely to approach VAD is indicative of that employees may cognitively express VAD as a way to manage uncertainty. As the ultimate goal of articulateddissent expression is problem-solving (Kassing, 1997), it is possible that employees with higher OCA have a higher need to manage uncertainty and thus are more likely to approach VAD.

The study's findings suggest that virtual latent dissent had a positive relationship with

technical skills and a negative relationship with age. In other words, those who are younger and have higher technical skills are more likely to engage in VLD expression. The new generation workforce possesses vastly different work values and ethics than their predecessors. Often as "digital natives", they have a higher level of digital immersion and aremore competent technology users. At the time, the younger generation cares more about job satisfaction and organizational ethics (To & Tam, 2014). They may be less tolerant of organizational problematic conducts and wrongdoings. Thus, it is unsurprising that younger workers who are well-versed in technology would not hesitate to share their dissatisfactions with their peers.

Limitation

While previous studies of organizational dissent used cross-sectional samples (Goodboy et al., 2008), due to its cross-sectional design, this study is limited in its ability to confirm the causal relationship among the variables. Furthermore, measuring VOD, this studyused Kassing's (1998) scale, which measures face-to-face dissent. The contextual differences of online and offline organizational communication warrant the development of a specific VOD measurement scale. While the study has surveyed participants' total virtual team experiences, the amount of time spent in a particular team was not examined. As virtual teams are often project-based that can be quickly assembled and dismissed, it is important toinvestigate employee voice behaviors in specific teams while controlling for their senioritiesand relationships with other members.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of online anxiety on VOD and showed that generally, higher online anxiety in the forms of OCA and DTA increase the possibility of latent and articulated forms of VOD. The study reasons that the affordances of online communication such as metavoicing, asynchronicity and editability create enough cognitive and affective encouragement for the employees to express their disagreement in virtual teams. This finding was further supported by the positive impact of technical skills on VOD, which showed that employees who are more skillful in using online communication and benefit from the provided affordances are more likely to dissent virtually. Also, the study showed that younger employees make more VLD, but previous experience in virtual teams or the amount of workload done virtually did not affect VOD.

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4.3 Article III

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the candidate and the candidate's Primary Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality.*

Name of candidate:	Hui Chen
Name/title of Primary Supervisor:	Professor Stephen Croucher
In which chapter is the manuscript /published work:	Original Articles

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   • The percentage of the manuscript/published work that was contributed by the candidate:

   • Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the manuscript/published work:
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○ It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal

Candidate's Signature:	Hui Chen
Date:	28-Mar-2022
Primary Supervisor's Signature:	Professor Stephen Croucher
Date:	1-Apr-2022

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The impact of WeChat use on dissent: applying uses and gratificationtheory to understand dissent

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Abstract

Online organisational dissent is an emerging phenomenon in our digital environment, but studies are at an early stage of developing an understanding of the nuances of conceptualisations, methodologies, and cultural distinctions. Social media platforms, such asWeChat, afford a medium to explore how such channels influence organisational behaviours.This study investigates two critical organisational issues: the relationship between WeChat use and organisational dissent in China; and the role of face concerns in dissent. Uses and Gratification Theory (UAGT) is applied to examine the contextual links and motivations.

Findings emphasise the multifactorial nature of online organisational dissent, including itscultural distinctions. Results demonstrate that perceived efficacy is associated with face concerns when employees choose to dissent in a less anonymous medium.

Keywords: organisational dissent, face concerns, WeChat use, uses and gratification theory

The impact of WeChat use on dissent:

Applying uses and gratification theory to understand organisational dissent

The use of social media as a mode of organisational communication is expanding. Forexample, WeChat, created in 2011, has become one of the most popular smartphone applications in China and other Asian countries, with over one billion monthly active users (Montag et al., 2018). WeChat has been integrated into people's lives; people now use WeChat for banking, entertainment, social interaction, sharing opinions, and information exchange (Hou et al., 2018). Increasingly, people are using WeChat to express contradictory opinions about daily life, social issues, and their jobs. When they express contradictory opinions or disagreement over organisational policies, operations, and practices, it is referred to as organisational dissent (Kassing, 1998). While the majority of organisational dissent research has focused on face-to-face dissent (Garner, 2017; Hastings & Payne, 2013; Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2018), online organisational dissent is an emerging phenomenon (Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2018). However, there is minimal research on online dissent. As such,it is not fully understood in terms of conceptualisation, measurements, methods, and consequences. Compared with face-to-face dissent, exploring online social media communication platforms, such as WeChat, will enhance our understanding of how computer-mediated communication channels influence organisational behaviours and how people express workplace concerns. Hence, further exploration aids us in our understandingof the antecedents and perceptions of online dissent.

When considering the context of social media platforms such as WeChat, face plays aprominent role in online communication. In addition, expressing dissent introduces a potential threat to another's face and situated identity. It puts the dissenter's face and impression into question, where dissenters are highly likely to be perceived negatively (Kassing & Armstrong, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 2005). Also, dissenters must consider and negotiate their face and another's face. Thus, the current study explores how WeChat is used as a dissent medium among Chinese employees. Specifically, this study examines two criticalorganisational issues: the relationship between WeChat use and dissent in China and the role of face concerns on WeChat use in relation to organisational dissent.

This study applies Uses and Gratification Theory (UAGT) (Katz et al., 1973) to understand the links between WeChat use and dissent. More specifically, UAGT explains that individuals are active and motivated in

their media use. They deliberately select and use media to fulfil their particular social and psychological needs or goals. This study aimed to establish the links between dissent and UAGT and gain a more in-depth understanding of the motivations and beliefs concerning willingness or unwillingness to choose different channels/mediums to dissent.

Organisational dissent

Organisational dissent refers to expressing disagreement or opposing opinions concerning workplace policies, practices, or operations (Kassing, 1998). Three types of dissent (articulated, latent, and displaced) have been identified based on the dissenting audience. Articulated dissent refers to open and direct communication to management. Latentdissent refers to communication to co-workers. Displaced dissent refers to dissent to people outside the organisation, for example, friends and family members (Kassing, 2011).

For many employees, dissenting can be risky and distressing with economic and personal consequences (Kassing, 2011), especially as expressing workplace dissent involves confronting real or perceived conflicts with related organisational members. When dissentingupward, which can potentially involve more risk, the audience is typically made up of members with higher positions or organisational status. Also, individuals vary in comfort and confidence when expressing their dissent, while their sense of powerlessness and avoidance of conflicts also influences their dissent (Kassing, 2011). In particular, articulated dissent is influenced by organisational, relational, and individual factors. Consequently, employees who perceive higher levels of workplace freedom of speech in their workplaces are more likely to express articulated dissent. In contrast, in a restrained workplace, the dissenter is more likely to be seen as a "troublemaker" instead of an "engaged employee" (Zeng, 2018).

When individuals have a higher quality superior-subordinate relationship, indicating higher levels of trust in their management, they are more comfortable expressing articulated dissent. At an individual level, employees with higher levels of organisational identification,assimilation, job satisfaction, and a higher position are more likely to express articulated dissent; while those with lower levels of workplace burnout are also more likely to express articulated dissent (Croucher et al., 2020a; Kassing, 2011; Payne, 2007). The key is the levelof organisational attachment or participation in decision-making. Individuals who feel more attached and comfortable participating are more likely to engage in articulated dissent.

Face as an explanatory mechanism for proclivity for dissent

Face-negotiation theory (FNT) explains how individuals negotiate face concerns andfacework in

communication, especially in a conflict situation. FNT argues: (a) individuals inall cultures attempt to preserve and negotiate face in communication circumstances; (b) faceis particularly risky in vulnerable situations (such as embarrassment and conflict situations) when the situated identities of the communicators are called into question. (c) cultural, individual, and situational factors impact individuals' selection of face concerns over others (such as self-oriented face-saving vs other-oriented face-saving); and (d) face concerns impact the use of facework and conflict strategies in intergroup and interpersonal encounters (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003).

Face is a claimed sense of interactional identity in a specific circumstance. Facework is linked closely with identity and relationship conflict goals (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Individuals vary in the extent of concerns for their self-image or others' image. Three kinds of face concerns are identified: self-face or concern for one's own image; other-face or concern for accommodating another's image; and mutual-face, concern for both parties' images and/or the "image" of the relationship (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). An individual who perceives their self-image as independent is more likely to express self-face in conflict and dissent situations. Interdependent members tend to engage other/mutual-face in conflict and dissent situations. Conceptualizing dissent as a type of conflict, face has been tested as anexplanatory mechanism for the proclivity to dissent (Croucher et al., 2020a; Oetzel et al., 2001).

Collectively, dissent provides a chance for someone to express their disagreement oropposition to a position, policy, or situation. In doing this, individuals risk the possibility ofoffending, causing conflict, and/or damaging their own or another person's face. Thus, it is essential a person manage/negotiate face while dissenting. Essentially, the success of the dissent comes from a person's ability to negotiate face.

Uses and gratification theory

The core assumption of uses and gratification theory (UAGT) is that the audience is active and motivated in their media use. The theory states individuals are active in selecting and using media to fulfil or gratify certain social and psychological needs or goals (Katz et al., 1973), rather than being helpless victims of mass media (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Thus, media use behaviour is goal-driven, with this utilitarian view explaining motivations inmedia use (Leung, 2013). UAGT has been used widely to explain why individuals use traditional and new media and describe what they use. Early research focused on television, radio, and other traditional media to understand customers' behaviour and how they use media to satisfy their needs.

One of the earliest studies of UAGT was by Herzog (1942), who found radio listenersgratified their needs

for emotional release, wishful thinking, and advice. Later Palmgreen and Rayburn (1979) explored television viewing in relation to both uses and gratifications soughtsimultaneously. The desire to seek social and/or psychological gratification drives media usage decisions, and the media user's perceived outcomes are defined in terms of gratifications obtained. He argued that other factors (for example, available delivery systems,work schedule, family circumstances) might override personal motivations in media use.

UAGT has also been applied widely to various new media and user-generated content(Leung, 2009), mainly the Internet (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000) and mobile phones (Leung & Wei, 2000). The research has suggested a wide range of motivations and gratifications such as passing the time/habit, information, entertainment, conversation and socialising. Specifically, five motivations identified in Internet use include: interpersonal utility; passingtime; information seeking; convenience; and entertainment. Results indicate instrumental, ritualised Internet use differences and a functional alternative to face-to-face communication (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The institutional motives, including mobility, immediacy andinstrumentality, were the primary motives in predicting cell phone use, followed by "affection and sociability" as the secondary motive, where cell phones were used as a meansto show affection (Leung & Wei, 2000).

In research measuring television uses and gratifications (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979), as well as internet uses and gratifications (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), seven themesare generally associated with social media use: social interaction; information seeking; passing time; entertainment; relaxation; communicatory utility; and convenience utility (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Recently, UAGT has been used as a framework to understand WeChat use motivations and gratifications. Early research on WeChat use motivation stated the need for social exchange is one of the primary factors driving individuals' use (Montag etal., 2018; Wang et al., 2019), including gratifying their need for relaxation and stress relief and keeping contact with their friends (Mao, 2014). Research has found entertainment, sociality, and information also motivates WeChat use (Lien & Cao, 2014). Later research identified four factors of WeChat use: passing time, affection, sociability, and following fashion (Pang, 2016). Recent research also asserts, "the information acquisition motive and social interaction motive are two main motivators for social media use" (Wang et al., 2019, p.245). With the increasing integration of WeChat into individuals' daily lives and careers, WeChat is the essential and daily communication channel with all connections, including family, friends, managers, and colleagues in China. As such, individuals can also express their workplace concerns, dissatisfactions and alienated emotions when they use WeChat.

WeChat

WeChat has integrated into people's everyday lives and businesses in China. Compared to other forms of social media, it shares similar text and voice messaging functionsand encourages sharing moments with online friends. There are three primary communicationpatterns in WeChat: text messages, voice messages or calls, and moments. In moments, users typically post their pictures, messages, or videos, including daily activities. They can also post web links. Their online friends can see and comment on those posts. It allows users to doeverything, including making payments, participating in group meetings, and playing games. For example, users can use WeChat to book flights, hotels, doctor appointments, pay for a bus, shopping, dating, and many other financial services. Many professionals prefer to use WeChat over emails to discuss business matters. It has developed from its root as a message app to an all-in-one "super app". However, the WeChat uses and gratification literature excluded those motivations. Exploring WeChat use/motivation and employee dissent can update WeChat uses and gratification in terms of its usage dimension. It also adds understanding to the perception of online dissent among employees.

Research question

Face negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005) explains that people are concerned withthe perceptions others have of them. They try to present and behave to form the desired self- image. Through social networking sites, users can provide more controlled forms of self- presenting online than face-to-face (Ellison et al., 2007). Using WeChat as a medium, individuals can use it to portray themselves, pertaining to the extent they have greater self- face, mutual-face, or other-face concerns. Chinese generally have high face concerns (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). They often invite a third party into conflicts to save their face due to great self-face concerns (Oetzel et al., 2001). Due to Chinese culture having a strong emphasis on maintaining a harmonious relationship with others, they also have a high likelihood of giving face to others or maintaining a positive image of the relationship (Wang et al., 2019). Thus, Chinese users are likely to have great concerns about their face, mutual-face, or the other-face in using WeChat. As the relationship between WeChat use and organisational dissent is unknown, the following research question was proposed:

RQ1: Why do employees use WeChat to express organisational dissent?

RQ2: What is the role of face concerns on WeChat use in relation to organisational dissent?

Method

A qualitative approach is used for this study because of the experimental nature of the study, where there is no existing literature specifically looking at WeChat and organisational dissent. This study aims to investigate the neglected phenomenon of using WeChat as an alternative dissenting medium rather than generalizing beyond the scope of the participants. In addition, this study explores the relationships between dissent and UAGT and examines the motives and attitudes behind the willingness or unwillingness to pick different mediums for dissent. Thus, open-ended questions are designed to generate valid research data surrounding these themes from participants.

Participants

A non-probability sample ($n = 316$) of adult full-time Chinese employees from various Chinese organisations was used to answer the open-ended questions. After ethical approval, data was collected via a professional Chinese survey collecting platform, Wenjuanxing. As six participants missed multiple answers in the survey, they were removed from the data analysis. In total, the final sample includes 310 participants. See Table 1 for demographics.

Table 1.
Demographics

	Variable	n	M	SD
Sex	Male	144		
	Female	166		
Age			35.82	8.58
Migrant or not	Yes	72		
	No	238		
Manager or not	Yes	No		
	176	134		
Tenure	Less than a year	26		
	1-2 years	31		
	3-5 years	79		

	6-10 years	86		
	11-15 years	38		
	16-20 years	21		
	20+ years	29		
Education	High school	3		
	Some undergraduate	22		
	Undergraduate degree or equivalent	220		
	Some graduate	9		
	Graduate or equivalent	47		
	PhD	9		
Industry	Education	51		
	Government	26		
	Business	154		
	Religion	1		
	Non-profit	15		
	Others	63		
Organisational Type	State-owned enterprises	122		
	Private-owned enterprises	162		
	Foreign-owned enterprises	26		

Measures

Questions were originally prepared in English. Native bilingual speakers translatedthem from English into Chinese. Separate bilingual speakers then back-translated the questions into English to check for accuracy.

Open-ended questions

The open-ended questions provided insights into the participants' motivations and beliefs in their dissent.

More importantly, the open-ended questions helped participants reflect on their dissenting experiences in relation to their motivations and concerns. As such, the emerging repeated themes may be helpful for building a dissent motivation scale for future research. The questions were constructed to aid participants in thinking about two issues. The first was their reasons for expressing disagreement in a particular way. This area of inquiry is based on the dissenting audience, location (in/outside their workplaces), and channels (face-to-face or online) they chose in their multiple previous questions. The second was their motivations for expressing their disagreement in the first place.

Results

To investigate the reasons why Chinese employees chose the dissenting audience, location, or channels, we were able to identify the following themes using a thematic analysis: 1) Convenience, 2) Efficiency, 3) Relational harmony. See Table 2 for a breakdown of the themes. Examples of each theme are as follows:

Table 2.

Results of why Chinese employees chose the way (online or FtF) to express their dissent

Theme	n
Convenience	40
Efficiency	73
Relational harmony	15

Theme 1, convenience; one participant, a 26-year female, said the following: "更加实时，如果面对面，需要协调两个人的时间" [More real-time, if face-to-face, we need to coordinate the time of two people]. A 39-year male said: "快速简单，便于沟通" [Fast and simple, easy to communicate]. Theme 2, efficiency; a 28-year female expressed: "高效" [Highly efficient]. Another example is a 29-year male who said: "更有效率" [More efficient]. Another typical response grouped under this theme is as follows: "比较直接" [More direct]. To conclude the three themes, the data reflected one remarkable changing Chinese value, where the modern workplace values directness, convenience, and efficiency as a priority (Faure & Fang, 2008). This problem-solving working attitude motivated them to communicate, which could be influenced by western management and lifestyle

concepts since the national "open-door" policy in 1978 (Faure & Fang, 2008).

Theme 3 reported various explanations for face and relationship concerns: for example, a 23-year female reported: "避免隔墙有耳 而且我个人注重角色" [To avoid wallswith ears, and I care about the image of my professional role]; A 20-year female said: "顾及面子" [Face concerns]; Theme 3 data reported online dissent is lessening the potential for embarrassment. A 36-year female explained: "在网上沟通意见可以避免很多尴尬，也不会让自己不满的情绪传递给对方" [Communicating opinions online can avoid much embarrassment, and it will not let my dissatisfaction be passed on to the receiver]; Similarly, a 47-year male said: "能避免面对面的尴尬，更畅顺的表达内心想法" [To avoid embarrassment in face-to-face, smoother to express my thoughts]; A 40-year male said: "比较温和, 不让领导尴尬" [Relatively gentle, not embarrassing the leader]. Furthermore, a 44-year female said: "融洽不影响工作以外的感情" [Keeping harmony can prevent personal relationships and feelings from being negatively affected]. This means dissenting online was perceived as maintaining her relationship and harmony with related organizational members compared to dissent face-to-face. In sum, the data from theme 3 reported employees felt theywere more easily able to negotiate face concerns on WeChat than in a face-to-face context.

The analysis of the first open-ended question showed the three main reasons why respondents chose particular ways (face-to-face or online) to express their dissent. One wasrelated to convenience, and two, effective communication , which revealed the need to express disagreements efficiently and accurately. The last was linked to relational harmony. The finding is consistent with dissent research; dissenters are cautiously evaluating their dissenting messages' competence (Kassing, 2011). Meanwhile, this study calls for future research to investigate how the negotiation between convenience and competence influences choice in dissenting channels.

The second open-ended question explored the reasons why Chinese employees expressed their disagreements, and we were able to identify the following themes: 1) Engaging constructive feedback, 2) Recognition 3) Release workplace stress, and 4) A sense of fairness. See Table 3 highlights these themes. Examples for each theme are as follows：

Table 3.

Results of why Chinese employees express their disagreements

Theme	*n*
Engaging constructive feedback	103
Recognition	67
Release workplace stress	27
A sense of fairness	19

Theme 1 engaging constructive feedback; one 42-year male participant said: "我想要更好地工作，提出对单位有益的方法" [I want to work better and come up with suitable methods for the workplace]. Similarly, a 58-year male expressed: "认为自己的想法更对单位、事业有利" [I think my ideas are more beneficial to my workplace and career]. A 50- year male said: "把问题解决了" [To solve the workplace problem]. A 62-year male expressed: "对工作和公司有益" [To do good for my work and workplace]. A 31-year male said: "不一样的决策，可能达到超预期的" [Different decisions can achieve unexpected better results]. The data grouped under theme 1 also revealed the motivation of engaging in solving workplace issues. A 34-year female reported: "为了改善当前得困境" [I want to resolve the current workplace issue]. A 28-year male said: "便于解决所发生的问题" [To help solve the workplace trouble (translation)]. To conclude, theme 1 reflected the positive perception of organizational dissent as providing constructive feedback. The dissenting motivation is for the benefit of their workplace and improves their work.

Theme 2 recognition; a 30-year female explained: "对事物有不同的看法，需要表达出来，得到一些认同" [I need to express my different views to get recognition]. A 32- year male mentioned: "否定了我的建议表示愤怒" [I was expressing anger because my suggestion was denied]. This theme also included self-expression, because most likely the motivation of individuals to express themselves are getting recognition. For example, a 39-year male expressed: "表达出自己的意见" [I want to express my opinion]. A 32-year male mentioned: "有意见就要表达" [Opinions are entitled to be expressed]. A 39-year female said: "表达需要" [For the need of self-expression].

Theme 3 demonstrated venting negative emotion to release workplace stress in WeChat as one important motivation. For example, a 31-year female said: "忍不住" [I cannot help stopping myself from expressing my

opinion]. A 48-year female expressed: "有多少时间长了受不了" [I cannot stand it anymore when it lasted a pretty long time]. A 34-year male mentioned: "舒缓调节心里" [To relieve my tension inside]. A 32-year female expressed: "不能憋着啊" [I cannot hold on to it]. A 26-year female said: "难受" [Because I feel hard]. Participants also explained the positive effects after their expression. A 32-year female said: "聊了会觉得轻松很多" Talking will make me feel much more relaxed]. A 30-year female illustrated: "因为有意见分歧的时候是令人心情不愉快的重要原因之一, 需要发泄" [Because having disagreements is one of the important reasons I feel unpleasant, I need to vent]. A 37-year female said: "不吐不快，有意见我就想直接说出来" [I want to say it directly if I have an opinion. Otherwise, I will have a bad mood]. These data demonstrated this venting negative emotion serving as emotional wellness in WeChat as one important use motivation.

Theme 4 a sense of fairness; for example, a 32-year female expressed: "我觉得不公平" [I think it's unfair]. A 30-year female reported: "这是我对工作的一种负责态度" [My responsible attitude towards work]. A 34-male said: "遇到不公平的事，或遇到对单位有益的想法". [Encountering injustice or coming up with ideas that are beneficial to the workplace]. A 45-year male said: "很不合理很不公平的事情当然要表达意见". [Very unreasonable and unfair things, of course, have to express my opinions].

These are the motives in dissent; the primary motivation indicated they engaged in constructive communication. They intended to provide constructive feedback to improve their organisations, reflecting the positive perceptions of dissent among Chinese employees. Following that, recognition was reported as the secondary motivation, which is followed by releasing workplace stress. The last but not the least is a sense of fairness.

Overall, their response indicated their positive attitudes towards the right to express different opinions, which may occur due to high internationality and high migration. Chinese employees tend to be more inclusive and open-minded towards differences in this modern age. It also reflects their need for emotional release and support.

<center>Thematic analysis</center>

The answers were first coded after identifying common patterns across the responses from all participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After that, similar codes were grouped under a shared theme after re-reading and revising

existing codes multiple times. For example, responses for using WeChat to dissent were coded as "direct communication" "accurate communication" and "speed communication". After re-reading and analysis, these codes were combined considering the underlying concern here was "efficiency". Another example is the theme "recognition", which includes the codes "recognition" and "self-expression" after considering the underlying motivation of expressing oneself was to get recognition. Similarly, after considering the respondents' purpose of venting negative feelings was to seek emotional support, "venting negative feelings" code was better placed to the theme "seek emotional support". In addition, in the coding stages, responses were coded as "responsibility", "injustice", and "fairness". After re-reading the responses and dissent triggering agents literature (Kassing, 2011), they were thematized as "a sense of fairness" because what perceived as injustice, unfair, irresponsible, and other unreasonable matters all move the employees to feel they must express their opposed opinions.

<center>**Discussion**</center>

This study offers significant theoretical, and methodological implications for the conceptualization of online organisational dissent, cultural perception of organisational dissent, as well as WeChat uses and gratification theory as follows.

Theoretical implications

Media visibility and online dissent perception

Organisational dissent scholars argue the availability of an online channel provides a chance for individuals to decrease the potential of retaliation from employers because "it often provides a degree of anonymity unavailable in face to face" communication (Kassing, 2011, p. 140). Prior online dissent research assumes dissenters choose a media forum with higher anonymity, such as a Radioshack forum (Turnage & Goodboy, 2016). The current study demonstrated, however, that employees might still prefer to dissent in WeChat despite an awareness they do not have anonymity. This result can partially explain the finding in dissent literature that employees rated organisational climate and attachment as being comparatively stronger than concerns about being perceived as adversarial and experiencing retaliation when reportedly dissenting to supervisors or co-workers (Kassing, 2008). Future online dissent studies should integrate organisational climate and organisational attachment toadd more clarification by investigating mediating factors, such as workplace freedom of speech and organisational identification.

Unlike employees who chose a high anonymity media to voice their workplace concerns (Kassing, 2011; Mao & DeAndrea, 2019), this study revealed employees chose theonline platform to negotiate face in organisational dissent while aware of limited anonymity.Since WeChat provides online private communication contexts, people tend to know each other, especially within workplace contexts. Existing employee voice models excluded how communication channel elements affect employees' perceptions of safety and efficacy (Mao& DeAndrea, 2019). A recent employee voice study indicated the more anonymous and lessapparent a voicing channel is to participants, the safer and more effective the medium is perceived to be (Mao & DeAndrea, 2019). However, this study demonstrated the perceived efficacy is associated more with face concerns when employees choose to dissent in a less anonymous media.

The current finding indicated organisational climate and attachment might outweigh the consideration of online anonymity in favour of the desire to protect related organisationalmembers' face/social image. Replication

of the study to further test this relationship can develop understanding of online employee voice and dissent. Future online dissent studies should differentiate features of online media affordance relating to their perceived anonymityand attributed uses/motivations in choosing that media in connection to face concerns.

The current study also implied the significance of media visibility in dissenting choiceby specifying dissenting virtual context. Future studies should differentiate various online dissenting sub-contexts in terms of anonymity, affordance, and visibility. As visibility is associated with audience size, future dissent studies should also investigate the different choices of communication, dyadic, group, or public context by integrating online communication apprehension theory (Hunt et al., 2012) as the dissenter and receiver relationship and comfort of expressing disagreements varies. Future studies will be fruitful in exploring and comparing how certain employees feel more ready to dissent on WeChat in comparison with those who are afraid to speak up.

Motivation for WeChat use is releasing negative feelings

WeChat uses and gratification literature excluded venting negative feelings as a factorin the uses/motivations (Lien & Cao, 2014; Wang et al., 2019), although the opposite affective motivation has been identified, for example providing emotional support to encourage others (Pang, 2016). This finding revealed that one important dissenting reason forChinese employees is emotional release might be because the prior study assumed the participants' uses in public posting in moments, while this study indicated a more private andless visible WeChat communication context. Here, intense feelings motivated employees to dissent, which might result from frustration from various parts of work. Collectively, this study demonstrated that seeking emotional support, in the form of venting negative emotions,is a critical WeChat uses dimension; future research should further test it, which could develop the current Uses and Gratification scholarship. Future studies should broadly investigate the relationships between why employees utilize this type of media (uses) relativeto anonymity, media affordance, and visibility, and what advantage (organisational, interpersonal) they obtain from dissent (gratification).

Methodological implications

Linguistic and cultural equivalence is a critical concern in translation (Brislin, 1970). Thisproject has used multiple bilingual native speakers to translate and back translate the measures to ensure validity among Chinese employees. However, the translators found several similar synonyms for "organisational dissent" in the Chinese language with different extents of positive and negative connotations during the translation yet none of them has the exact linguistic equivalence. Thus, it can be interpreted there was a vastly different understanding of these

terms among individuals, causing difficulty for participants to have the same understanding as the conceptualization. This echoed an experimental study of employee dissent among Chinese employees asserting there is no corresponding translation for the "organisational dissent" concept (Zeng & Croucher, 2017).

This study revealed the importance for native individuals to develop cultural-specificunderstanding of conceptualization of organisational dissent as this is critical for communication research to flourish outside the US. The US has been standing as the frontier of communication research worldwide; most areas in communication discipline are developed in the US context (Zeng, 2018). To advance dissent study in another cultural context, a longitudinal examination to track and correct the understanding of organisationaldissent in another culture plays an essential role (Croucher et al., 2020b), including investigating and reflecting cultural connotations from the local employees across time.

Limitations and future directions

One limitation of this study could be the lack of linguistically and culturally specific equivalence of organisational dissent. Future research could use more qualitative or a mixed-methods approach to gain more conceptual clarification in cross-cultural studies (Croucher, 2020b). Future research could connect uses and gratification theory and expectation violationtheory. Organisational dissent results from dissatisfaction with current conditions and expectations towards others/their organisations. Thus, it is closely related to the violation of expectations (Kassing, 2007). Future studies should include expectation violation theory to extend our understanding of dissent origin. As uses means individuals' expectations from their certain media use, it can advance UAGT in how the violation of expectations influences individuals' motivation in media consumption and dissent orientation.

In sum, this study offers the first step of understanding the links between WeChat useand organisational dissent. Employees selected the online platform to negotiate face in organisational dissent despite knowing anonymity was limited, highlighting the complicated relationships between media visibility and online dissent perception. In addition, the current study indicates venting negative emotions is a crucial WeChat use motivation. Furthermore, this study indicates the critical need for native individuals to develop a cultural-specific understanding of concepts for communication research. Future research should undertake related studies to explore different perceptions of online dissent, and add even more clarity tothe links between online platforms, dissent and face.

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TABLE 2 the Key Findings from Each Article

Article 1	Self-face and assimilation are positively correlated. Other-face and assimilation are positively correlated. Mutual-face and assimilation are positively correlated. Assimilation and articulated dissent are positively correlated. Organisational assimilation mediated the relationship between mutual-face and articulated dissent.
Article 2	Anxiety in online communication generally increases VOD, while OCA only increases VAD. Technical skills increased, and aging decreased VLD, while none of these variables affected VAD.
Article 3	A crucial motivation for WeChat use is negotiating face. The critical need for individuals to develop a culturally specific understanding of organisational dissent for communication research.

5 Discussion

This chapter consists of research implications, limitations, and future directions. Overall, this research project contributes to organisational dissent literature. It furthers the discussion on identity and conflicts by illustrating the indispensable identity suspicion issue (in expressing disagreements) in organisational communication. It also extends the original argument between face and dissent (Kassing, 2005; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002). Essentially, online organizational

dissent is principally impacted by face concerns, facilitated by online anxiety, which happens in an ongoing cognitive and affective process. Specifically, this research project illustrates that dissent and face are inherently linked and not just by varying degrees depending on the upward dissent strategy selected that poses more or less of a threat to face. Indeed, this work demonstrates that face operates as a broader consideration in dissent and not specifically dependent on the strategy selected. Collectively, online dissent consists of cognitive and affective components, motivated principally by face concerns, moved by individuals' experienced online anxiety. In addition to the theoretical implications, this project has methodological and practical implications.

Methodologically, the studies advocate for the urgency of developing a culturally specific understanding to represent organizational dissent for communication research. Empirically, the research findings have significant recommendations to increase employees' empowerment through assimilation and inclusiveness in their workplaces. The findings help managers to develop their leadership such as improving their face negotiation skills. Ultimately, these findings benefit organisations in improving their democracy, structure, and managing cultural and communication diversity.

This project was limited due to practical considerations in particular countries contexts, online dissent scale adoption, and web-based data collection. However, given the influence of social, political, legislative, and media contexts on employees' dissent, further studies are needed to keep investigating conceptualisations of FtF and online organizational dissent. The various perceptions can be obtained by tracking each dissent scale item, constantly exploring employees' dissenting motivation, internal cognitive and affective processes from cultural and individual perspectives, as well as the relationships between FtF dissent and online dissent not only contextual differences but also operations. Future studies are needed to conduct comparison studies in the aforementioned contexts to advance online organizational dissent scholarship vastly. Moreover, pilot studies are warranted in online dissent adoption to ensure its validity. Future studies must endeavor to access more flexible and richer data to understand how dissent is perceived and conceptualized among employees, such as through interviews. Continuous

improvement of mixed methods to reach the enormous potential while knowing practical considerations yield more reliable and replicable processes.

5.1 Main Findings and Implications

5.1.1 Theoretical Findings and Implications

The current project demonstrates that (FtF & online) dissent and face are linked inherently. Organizational dissent is confrontational. As a type of conflict, face concern is an explanatory mechanism in dissenting, during which organizational assimilation serves as a conflict-ridden buffer. Face negotiation theory defines face as the positive social value people effectively claim for themselves through the course others suppose they have followed during a specific interaction (Goffman, 1955; Ting-Toomey, 2005). The original research argued dissent and face were linked by varying degrees depending on the upward dissent strategy selected that poses more or less of a threat to the face process (Kassing, 2005; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002; Kassing, 2011a). This project confirms the original argument between face and dissent: expressing opposed and divergent views warrants impression management, where individuals strive to control the impressions that others form of them (Kassing, 2002). They especially must take significant consideration to readily attend to and protect face needs by recognizing the potential face threat introduced by upward dissent (Kassing, 2005). In addition, importantly, the current set of studies research show that face and dissent are intrinsically linked. In fact, this work illustrates that face is a concept that may be broadly understood as a consideration to dissent. Face operates as an antecedent in dissent. In dissent and conflict situations, independent individuals tend to show more self-face; in these same situations, interdependent individuals tend to show more other/mutual-face (Croucher et al., 2020a). Self-reported motivations of Chinese employees who dissented on WeChat include: "To avoid embarrassment face-to-face, smoother to express my thoughts (translation)", and this method being "relatively gentle, not embarrassing the leader (translation)." Such responses indicate that Chinese employees believed they could negotiate issues more readily on WeChat than in a FtF setting. Dissenting online was seen as maintaining the employees' relationship and harmony with associated organisational members (Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, face operates as an antecedent for dissent.

Furthermore, this project extended the organisational dissent scholarship in providing a cognitive and affective understanding of online organisational dissent at an individual and cultural level. Organizational dissent scholarship primarily explored organisational factors such as workplace freedom of speech, and relationship factors, such as employees' relationship quality with their supervisors. Compared with organizational and relational factors, individual factors are understudied. Understanding individuals' psychological experience in real and anticipated dissenting is essential to understanding the dissenting decision-making process. Specifically, it investigated dissent with psychological factors at an individual level, particularly face concerns, communication apprehension, and digital technology anxiety. The findings demonstrate face concerns operating as an antecedent, primarily motivating employees to both FtF and online dissent in both U. S. and Chinese contexts, which confirms that impression management and identity operates as a powerful mechanism in dissent and conflicts (Chen et al., 2022; Croucher et al., 2020a; Kassing, 2011a). When dissenting online, employees perceive possibilities to negotiate face online. Surprisingly in the dissenting process, employees' experience of online anxiety in online communication and technology usage confidence all positively increase their choice to dissent online. The individual psychological experience of anxiety facilitates online dissent among apprehensive employees to establish or restore control over the workplace through various types of synchronic and asynchronous communication (Rahmani et al., 2022). Altogether, this set of studies illustrated that dissent's cognitive and affective components, cultural and individual factors (face concerns) impact the decision-making process. Both FtF and online dissent are primarily motivated by face concerns, and online dissent is facilitated effectively through employees' psychological experience of online anxiety. In addition to theoretical implications, the research findings have implications for this study's research model.

First and foremost, the findings of this study indicate FtF and online dissent pertaining to employees' social or technical competency. The face concerns and dissent article found mutual face concerns were positively related to articulated dissent through organisational assimilation. This finding indicated that more socialised employees in their organisations are equipped with

higher face negotiation skills and are more ready to dissent to their management. The reason is that they are more informative and reflective of how others handle workplace conflicts and become more strategic in what and how to communicate in their organisations (Croucher et al., 2021).

The capacity perspective was also supported in the anxiety and online dissent article findings; technical skills significantly increased online dissent to management and coworkers (Rahmani et al., 2022). It is straightforward that employees with more competent technical skills are more ready to share their confrontational speeches online. Consistently, the qualitative data reported that when employees sense a higher capacity level in their organisations, they are more prone to dissent. For example, "I expressed dissent because my expression should work". On the contrary, when they perceive lower communication and negotiation competency levels, they are more likely to withdraw their voice. They reported: "My expression does not work and will not solve the problem". "My communication style is too direct to hurt others" "A man of the lower position carry little weight (indicating my expression will not be heard, let alone change the unsatisfactory events)." (Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, the decision to dissent either FtF or online is related to perceived capacity. Employees with higher levels of perceived communication and technical competence are more ready to deliver their organisational dissent controlled for their organisational position.

Second, this study extended our understanding of employees' feelings and attitudes towards online communication and organisational dissent's impact on their dissent orientation. The quantitative results found that the two forms of online anxiety (OCA and DTA) increase online dissent. Previously the authors provided a rationale for the surprising results from the neuroticism perspective. Neuroticism might influence the relationships between online anxiety and online dissent because employees with higher levels of neuroticism are more likely to feel worried and have less tolerance for uncertainty and misbehaviours. Therefore, they are more likely to dissent. This explanation sheds a partial understanding of the online dissent process for those generally anxious employees.

The qualitative results complemented understanding by integrating employees' repeated

online communication attitudes in dissent: convenience, and avoiding miscommunication. "Online communication is easy and time-saving; if face-to-face, we need to coordinate the time of two people". They are also concerned that online communication may cause misunderstanding. For example, "Online communication is harder to understand the effectiveness of communication. For example, lacking tone and facial expressions can lead to the miscommunication". Ledbetter (2009) states that online communication attitudes have five dimensions: Self-Disclosure, Apprehension, Miscommunication, Social Connection, and Ease. To conclude, online organisational dissent choice is shaped by employees' characters and online communication attitudes. From the mixed methods results, online communication apprehension, convenience intention, and the potential cost of miscommunication shape employees' choice to dissent.

In summary, the integrated quantitative and qualitative findings added clarity to the proposed paths between the concepts, confirmed the positively associated paths, and found the correlations between the uncertain variables, and possible latent factors between the online anxiety and online dissent paths. The findings revealed that 1) FtF and organisational dissent require social or technical competency concerning face concerns and effective communication. Their channel choice was pertaining to their online communication attitudes on ease and misunderstanding concerns as well as anxiety. 2) Online communication provides a resourceful context for expressing one's views and opinions and compensates for the various forms of self- and other-imposed censorship in offline organisational communication due to the interaction of technological competitiveness, social competitiveness, communication capacity, personal traits, cultural orientations, and social structures.

5.1.2 Methodological Findings and Implications

This project demonstrated that when organizational dissent is applied to other cultural contexts, especially when translated into another language, it can be problematic to find a linguistic and cultural equivalence to ensure the same understanding and enactment over time. Communication research needs to ensure the same understanding of the concept in a different culture. Thus, it is urgent to develop an understanding of the nuances of conceptualisations,

methodologies of organisational dissent, and cultural distinctions between the U.S. context and any another one.

Linguistic Equivalence. Linguistic equivalence is a critical concern in translation (Brislin, 1970). This project used multiple bilingual native speakers to translate and backtranslate the survey to ensure validity among Chinese employees. The translators found several similar synonyms of "organisational dissent" in the Chinese language with different extents of positive and negative connotations during the translation, yet none of them has theexact linguistic equivalence. Thus, it can be interpreted with a vastly different understandingamong individuals, causing difficulty for participants to have the same understanding as native English speakers. This echoed an experimental study of employee dissent among Chinese employees, which asserts no corresponding translation for the "organisational dissent" concept (Zeng & Croucher, 2017).

Cultural Equivalence. Cultural equivalence is an essential concern for validity in intercultural studies. Although the OD has been tested over time in the U.S. context as the same understanding, it failed to demonstrate the same conceptualization in non-U.S. contexts(Croucher et al., 2020b). This project revealed two inherited cultural biases that may impede the cultural distinctions of organisational dissent in Chinese employees. The first one is the authority acceptance differences. As employee dissent is associated with power, expressing organizational dissent is likely to be perceived as a challenge to the status quo. The difference between accepting power distance and authority is rooted in cultural differences. Freedom of speech is often taken for granted as a fundamental natural right in U.S. organisations (Croucher et al., 2020b), while traditional Chinese culture prioritizes sacrificing for the common good or self-interest as a priority, respecting hierarchy and social order to the primary common good and group harmony.

On the other hand, this project revealed that venting negative emotions was one important factor that motivated employees to dissent in WeChat, revealing that online dissenthas both instrumental and non-instrumental functions among Chinese employees. This finding indicated that seeking wellness and emotional support drove employees to express their disagreements, which seems consistent with the moral value of self-expression and workplace freedom of speech

in modernising traditionally collective culture. Moreover, this project revealed that developing a culturally specific scale with high validity for dramaticallydeveloping nations, such as China, is crucial to investigate the interplay between the traditional and modern Chinese culture associated with employees' emotional and wellness perceptions.

Collectively, this study revealed that the urgency to develop culturally-specific conceptualisations from the native individuals is critical for communication research to flourish out of the U.S. The U.S. has been standing as the frontier of communication researchworldwide; most scales in the communication discipline are developed in the U.S. context (Zeng, 2018). To advance dissent study in another cultural context, a longitudinal examination to track and correct the validity of organisational dissent in the same culture plays an essential role (Croucher et al., 2020b). Furthermore, developing a specific cultural understanding oforganisational dissent from the local employees will vastly advance dissent research.

5.1.3 Practical Findings and Implications

This project has significant implications for employees', managers', andorganisational learning.

Employee Empowerment. The findings indicated the urgent need for employees to enhance their competence in negotiating face in organisational conflicts and dissenting situations. They can build strategies to support mutual parties' face needs through their organisational assimilation and socialization. The first article found that assimilation is a conflict-ridden process in articulated dissent (Croucher et al., 2020a), implying the significance for employees to assimilate into their organisations, which enables them to address their workplace concerns. Their active participation in organizational socialization activities and team cooperation both online and offline can facilitate the assimilation process. During these interactions, they get familiar with other organisational members and the organisational climate, learn the workplace policies, formal and informal rules, observe and identify the face concerns of different organisational members through their conflict styles displayed in conflict situations (Croucher et al., 2020a). Ultimately, they better understand thediscursive functions and ways of communicating openly in connection to dissent and face. Discursive functions such as:

what it means to be professional;

formal and informal expectations and rules;

the significance of organisational politics; and

the importance of giving input and communicating openly

should be considered inconnection to dissent and face.

Learning these discursive functions enables employees to communicate openly while strategically and successfully negotiating face with other organisational members, especiallytheir management. These steps lead them to express dissent upward comfortably, ultimately promote and empower themselves, increase their self-esteem and job satisfaction, and life happiness rather than suffering stress and burnout (Kassing, 1997).

Transformational Leadership and Constructive Dissent. The transformational leadership style is essential for managers to hear employees' voices. This project has significant practical implications for managers to develop their leadership style, ultimately transforming the organisational culture by recognizing dedicated employees' engagement andinnovation.

Supporting employees' faces in dissent opens the door for their dissent. Dissent research has identified that organisational climate and attachment primarily indicate employees' decision to express dissent more than the concerns of being perceived as adversarial and retaliatory. The management plays an essential role in creating an open, communicative environment where employees can perceive high levels of workplace freedom of speech (Kassing, 2008). The literature was limited in suggesting concrete actions to create the open-door communication climate. By demonstrating face as an explanatory mechanism for articulated dissent, this project makes significant contributions in encouragingmanagers to use face concerns to develop competent conflict resolution and dissent tactics.

One fundamental step to building the working climate encouraging employee voice is to support employees' faces and identities. An increasingly diverse and intercultural workforce globally poses a new challenge for managers to develop their leadership styles to motivate their employees, especially employees with different cultural backgrounds and conflict resolution styles pertaining to various face concerns. When responding to employees' dissent,managers

should sensibly support employees' face concerns; this builds the essential step for employees to open their workplace concerns to management where they feel their voice andviews are respected. The face negotiation success enables managers to hear various employees' voices and correct workplace issues known from the bottom while not being known by management. Those voices can also stop inefficient decisions, and developing a transformational leadership style is essential for managers.

Findings of this project indicate that it is advisable that managers develop competent conflict resolution and dissent tactics by including face concerns into conflict resolution and dissent tactics (Croucher et al., 2020a). To build facework negotiation competency in conflicts and conflicted acts, and dissent (Ting-Toomey, 2005), people must first have a goodawareness of their own face needs as well as the face needs of the conflicting party, because conflicted partners are more inclined to appreciate and collaborate with one another when face threat is reduced in disagreements. To find employees' face concerns in conflicts, managers can observe employees' conflict behaviours, either with themselves or other members. Employees who utilise a dominant conflict style or aggressive and defensive strategies in conflict situations, for example, are prone to self-concern. Employees with conflict-avoidance, integration, and compromise approaches prefer mutual or other-face concerns (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). They are more likely to be worried about self-face if they defend themselves and are forceful in fights. They support mutual-face concerns if they keep calm, apologize, discuss concerns discreetly, favour problem-solving, and practice respect.

Organisational Assimilation Fosters Employees to Provide Constructive Dissent.

The findings added mutual face concern as an antecedent to our understanding of the relationship between assimilation and expressed disagreement (Goldman & Myers, 2015). Employees with mutual-face concern are more likely to dissent to the management through assimilation. They are more likely to feel comfortable and capable of venting dissent to their management as they become more absorbed in their companies, tactically reinforcing both conflicted parties' images. Empirically, the findings can assist managers in predicting which employees are likely to use articulated dissent to uncover underlying conflicts and resolve them within the workplace. As for

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management, the process of assimilating employees becomes more critical so that employees are comfortable to dissent (Croucher et al., 2020a). Due to an increasingly diverse and international workforce, integrating different cultures' assimilation activities with employees of different cultural backgrounds can enhance the interpersonal bond. These activities may need to extend outside workplaces relating to employees' expectations. For example, Chinese employees and leaders do not delineate a clear relationship inside and outside the workplace (Wang et al., 2019). Chinese social valuesstress frequent social interaction outside the workplace (Chen et al., 2009), indicating that a higher quality relationship needs social interaction inside and outside the workplace. The firststudy found that employees with mutual face concerns are likely to dissent upward through assimilation. Thus, these interactions create more proximity and enhance employees' mutual face concerns in conflict and dissent situations. Future studies investigating employees from other collective cultures will yield fruitful results.

5.1.4 Limitations and Future Directions

This project has limitations and future indications on samples and scales in several aspects. First, each of the three studies only investigated a single cultural group, replication ofthe study using an intercultural sample could yield different results (Croucher et al., 2020a). Second, the study did not conduct a virtual organisational dissent scale pilot test. Given that there is no existing scale for assessing employee dissent in an online setting, such adoption is recommended. Further online dissent studies could conduct prior pilot testing of the redesigned scale to improve the scale's validity.

This project demonstrated the theoretical link between face concerns and dissent, during which assimilation served as a conflict-ridden process. Adding more clarity on how face concerns influence the propensity for dissent could be the next step. Furthermore, the current project furthered organisational dissent study in linking virtual dissent to psychological factors at an individual level, including online communication apprehension and digital technology anxiety, while this study is limited in its ability to investigate whether there is a relationship between OCA and DTA due to cross-sectional sample design in organisational dissent study literature. Further studies are warranted to examine whether changes in technology, fear, and competence will

reflect OCA. Future studies should also include psychological traits such as the Big Five personality traits to understand further the decision-making process of voicing dissent. In addition to these, as organisational assimilation consists of three stages where an individual's face concerns shift according to hissocial distance or proximity between the existing employees and himself (Croucher et al., 2020a), further investigation into each stage may yield mixed results, providing a more comprehensive understanding of organisational dissent, face concerns, and assimilation.

Future studies might investigate employees from different organisational types. As this study focused on employees' social media use and dissent at an individual level, organisational type was controlled for its influence, while organisational dissent is closelylinked with hierarchies within organisations. Chinese organisations are unique in comprisingthree types of organisations, with different ownership structures: state-owned enterprises, private-owned enterprises, and foreign-invested enterprises. They differ significantly in organisational culture and employee attitudes (Zeng, 2018).

Future studies would benefit from integrating cost and benefit analysis relating to perceived closeness and power distance between dissenters and related members. Individualsare motivated to dissent by fulfilling their expectations (benefits) for their work while they must take great account of the potential retaliation (costs). The ramifications are quite different depending on the various dissenting audiences. How might one choose to express dissent to a manager within an organisation? Or to someone they work with but are not "veryclose to"? There might be a threat to the relationship if someone dissents within that context, but no economic repercussions might alter motivational factors. Future studies might investigate how a potential dissenter's weight to their cost relates to their motivations. Future studies would benefit from replicating these results in an international sample. As this study was limited to China, future studies should further investigate individuals'motivation in using social media and dissent in different national contexts to yield different results.

Exploring various perspectives from different involved parties in dissent will shed further light on organisational dissent. As with most dissent studies, this project only investigated the

employees. In comparison, dissent is co-constructed by both dissenters, intended audience, and bystanders (Garner, 2013). Future research into dissent would benefit from examining organisational dissent from the perspective of other involved members. For example, managers' face concerns would influence employees' dissent. Such studies will help one party better evaluate the possible experience of "the other" as a dissenter or dissenting audience and decide when and how to dissent or respond to the dissenter accordingly. In addition, exploring a transformation of leadership style and organisational structure to build an effective mechanism for dissent would be helpful as workplace issues can be more complicated than what individual organisational members can address.

Longitudinal investigations of the perception of (virtual) organisational dissent are needed. As organisational dissent does not happen in a vacuum (Croucher et al., 2018), the perceptions of organisational dissent are impacted by everchanging economic, political, and socio-cultural factors. Likewise, the perceptions of dissent are fluid along with these factors. Hence, a continuous investigation of the perception and connotations of dissent is warranted to have an updated understanding of changing times. For example, the perception of the seriousness, openness, and tolerance of the same triggering agent can be perceived and treated vastly differently culturally, morally, and socially. These different evaluations may also connect to different genders or personalities, such big problems as workplace bullying, harassment, sexism, and smaller payments. Therefore, investigation perceptions of dissent among multiple groups could be an area for further study. Moreover, workplace issues such as workplace harassment and bullying in one culture may not be taken as seriously as in another culture. Thus, there are significant opportunities for intercultural studies to shed light on the understanding of dissent.

6 Summary

Dissent is a ubiquitous communicative act. It is embedded in our institutions, such as governments or schools, as well as in our leisure activities. Organisational dissent occurs when employees feel apart from their organisations and then decide to express their disagreements or opposition to their organisational policies, operations, and practices. On the one hand, organisational dissent serves as an indicator of employee work satisfaction, involvement, work engagement; constructive dissent is beneficial for organisations andemployees. On the other hand, dissent expression is risky in terms of ignorance and retaliation, including job security and interpersonal relationships. Thus, dissent can be stressful; employees tend to stay silent. Organisational dissent has continuously drawn attention from organisational and business scholars over the last decade.

Organisational dissent literature mainly employed Kassing's dissent definition, theory,and scale to measure dissent face-to-face. The dissent literature was limited in several aspects as follows. First, dissent scholarship has primarily investigated face-to-face dissent, while online dissent was understudied. Second, dissent literature has asserted that its audience often perceives dissenting as a conflict-inducing form of communication, implying dissenting is face-threatening. Face has been extensively linked with numerous forms of conflict communication, while face is excluded from dissent literature. Understanding the role of face may further explain this form of communication. Thus, it is imperative to examine how face explains dissent. Third and last, individual factors, as opposed to relational and organisationalfactors, are less explored in dissent studies. Dissent research states that dissent's nature is confrontational and stressful. However, there is limited understanding of the emotional imperatives or impacts of such communicative behaviour, especially in an online environment where online dissent becomes prevalent. Investigating the extent of which employees' digital technology anxiety and online communication apprehension would help understand virtual dissent in online organisational communication. Thus, to explore the links between those constructs and examine dissent online, this project was established to investigate the following questions.

I. What is the relationship between organisational dissent, face concerns (self, other, mutual-face) and organisational assimilation?

II. How do face concerns and online anxiety (communication apprehension, digital technology apprehension) shape the development of online employee dissent？

III. What are the motivations of Chinese employees to dissent (online)?

This project used both quantitative and qualitative methods, including Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The project findings a) demonstrated the theoretical link between face negotiation theory and organisational dissent. It also explained the nature of assimilation as a conflict-ridden process between mutual-face concern and articulated dissent, revealing the self-presentation process (face) is more critical as a person assimilates into an organisation. b) added to our understanding of the multifactorial nature of online organisational dissent, including its cultural distinctions in the following aspects:

First, dissent in a virtual team and linking virtual dissent to factors at an individual level as opposed to relational and organisational factors are understudied. This project found that employees with higher neuroticism use online dissent to restore control for reducing uncertainty in their workplace, revealing it is crucial to explore further the moderating role of neuroticism in the relationship between anxiety and organisational behaviours. Second, this project discovered virtual dissent is related more to individual confidence in one's technological competence than fear of approaching communication. Third and last, perceived efficacy is associated strongly with face concerns when employees choose to dissent in a less anonymous medium.

This project urged scholars to conduct a pilot test to the virtual dissent scale. A longitudinal investigation of the perception of organisational dissent from a different cultural perspective, and various stakeholders, can advance dissent studies. Future related studies accordingly should give sufficient weight to face in differentiating features of online media affordance. This research provides insight into applying Face Negotiation Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory; and demonstrates virtual organisational dissent understanding in American and Chinese contexts. Inherent cultural concerns were noted for cultural equivalence of

organisational dissent, indicating the critical need for developing the nuances of

conceptualisations, methodologies, and cultural distinctions for such communication research.

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