

# Fostering Active Citizenship: Facebook's Role in Youth Civic Engagement

## Fomentar la ciudadanía activa: el rol de Facebook en el compromiso cívico de los jóvenes

*Fomentar a cidadania ativa: O papel do Facebook no compromisso cívico dos jovens*

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**ABSTRACT** | Social media platforms (SMPs) have revolutionized social networks by facilitating connections and shaping the landscape of social interactions. The role of SMPs in contemporary civic participation, both online and offline, is undeniable. However, to understand the beliefs that drive young adults to use popular SMPs such as Facebook for civic engagement, fresh perspectives must be considered. This study extends the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by conducting a questionnaire among 209 university students who actively use Facebook. Our results show that both expectancy and social influence gave a significant impact on students' intentions to use Facebook for civic engagement. We also identify Facebook mobilization efforts via smartphones as a strong predictor of both intention and use of Facebook for civic engagement. These findings indicate that Facebook is a valuable tool for young people to engage and participate in online social and political movements. While we acknowledge the limitations of this study, our analysis underscores the immense potential of SMPs as means for political participation.

**KEYWORDS:** participatory organizations; citizen participation; facebook; UTAUT; civic engagement; young; Social Media Platforms.

### FORMA DE CITAR

Borrero, J.D. & Borrero-Domínguez, E. (2024). Fostering Active Citizenship: Facebook's Role in Youth Civic Engagement. *Cuadernos.info*, (57), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.57.63423>

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**RESUMEN** | *Las plataformas de medios sociales (PMS) han revolucionado las redes sociales al facilitar las conexiones y configurar el panorama de las interacciones sociales. Su rol en la participación ciudadana actual, tanto en línea como fuera de ella, es innegable. Sin embargo, para comprender las creencias que impulsan a los jóvenes a utilizar las PMS populares como Facebook para el compromiso cívico, se deben considerar nuevas perspectivas. Este estudio amplía la teoría unificada de la aceptación y el uso de la tecnología (UTAUT) realizando una encuesta entre 209 estudiantes universitarios que utilizan Facebook de forma activa. Nuestros resultados muestran que tanto la expectativa como la influencia social influyen significativamente en la intención de los estudiantes de utilizar Facebook para el compromiso cívico. Asimismo, identificamos los esfuerzos de movilización de Facebook mediante teléfonos inteligentes como un sólido predictor tanto de la intención como del uso de Facebook para el compromiso cívico. Estos resultados indican que Facebook es una valiosa herramienta para que los jóvenes se comprometan y participen en movimientos sociales y políticos en Internet. Aun reconociendo las limitaciones de este estudio, nuestro análisis subraya el inmenso potencial de las PMS como medios para la participación política.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *organismos de participación; participación ciudadana; Facebook; UTAUT; compromiso social; jóvenes; plataformas de redes sociales.*

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**RESUMO** | *As plataformas de mídias (PMS) revolucionaram as redes sociais ao facilitar as ligações e moldar o panorama das interações sociais. O papel na participação cidadã atual, tanto online como offline, é inegável. No entanto, para compreender as crenças que levam os jovens adultos a utilizarem PMS populares, como o Facebook, para o compromisso cívico, devem se considerar novas perspectivas. Este estudo expande a Teoria Unificada da Aceitação e Uso da Tecnologia (UTAUT) através da realização de um inquérito a 209 estudantes universitários que utilizam ativamente o Facebook. Os nossos resultados revelam que tanto a expectativa como a influência social têm um impacto significativo nas intenções dos estudantes de utilizar o Facebook para o compromisso cívico. Além disso, identificamos os esforços de mobilização do Facebook através de smartphones como um fator de previsão robusto da intenção e da utilização do Facebook para o compromisso cívico. Estes resultados significam que o Facebook serve como uma ferramenta valiosa para os jovens se envolverem e participarem em movimentos sociais e políticos online. Embora reconheçamos as limitações deste estudo, a nossa análise sublinha o imenso potencial das PMS como meios de participação política.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *organismos de participação; participação cidadã; Facebook; UTAUT; compromisso social; jovens; plataformas de mídias sociais.*

## INTRODUCTION

The development, scope, and new uses of technology have fostered the emergence of new forms of expression that allow certain interest groups to organize through social media platforms (SMPs), creating new spaces for relationships and participation (Rodríguez-Suárez et al., 2021). Furthermore, these platforms are transforming civic engagement by providing new means of connecting, collaborating and mobilizing individuals (Gümüşay et al., 2022; Theocharis et al., 2022).

Young people are particularly affected by this dynamic as they are digital natives. In this context, the increasing appropriation of social media by them has led many scholars to study how SMPs affect their civic participation. Understanding this has become urgent, as the growing neglect for civic participation among young people is a cause of concern (Matenda et al., 2021). As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, strategies to promote youth civic engagement must be implemented (Tarman & Kilinc, 2022). However, little has been written about the beliefs that influence why and how young university students use popular SMPs for both civic engagement and offline political participation. This paper aims to contribute to the growing body of research on how SMP use influences the participation of these users in online and offline behaviors (Borrero et al., 2014a, Borrero et al., 2014b) by specifically addressing the following research question: Can Facebook promote civic engagement and offline political participation among university students?

We use an extended model of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003) as a theoretical framework for understanding youth perceptions of civic engagement through Facebook. In this adaptation of the classic UTAUT model, we introduce two additional engagement variables that are recognized by researchers (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009) as pivotal factors influencing behavior. Thus, this study fills a notable research gap that directly links UTAUT to the field of online mobilization and its resulting offline implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the factors that influence the acceptance and use of technology to promote youth involvement shows that technology can be a crucial factor for promoting youth engagement and empowerment. However, youth adoption and use of technology is not a certainty and is influenced by several variables such as personal characteristics (Barret & Pachi, 2019), technology design (Lemay et al., 2019), or social influence (Naranjo-Zolotov et al., 2019).

Most young people primarily access news and information online (Newman et al., 2021), specifically through social networks like Facebook, TikTok, or Instagram. These platforms also support civic participation and engagement (Kilybayeva & Nurshanov, 2020; Caliskan, 2021; Kittredge, 2022; Kunst et al, 2019; Masip et al., 2020; Smith & Halafoff, 2020; Yuan et al., 2019).

Civic participation and engagement are core aspects of active citizenship. Civic participation means that individuals actively contribute to democratic society through actions like voting, participating in community meetings, volunteering, and advocating for a cause. Civic engagement is a broader concept that encompasses not only formal civic involvement but also active participation in discussions, debates, and actions that address societal issues and foster positive change (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Ostrander, 2004).

In the context of youth, these concepts gain significance. Youth civic participation involves young people actively participating in democratic processes, empowering them and instilling a sense of responsibility toward their communities. Youth civic engagement also encompasses activities like social media activism, online discourse, and community organizing, as young people increasingly use digital platforms to raise their voices and influence social and political change (Gaby, 2017; Loader et al., 2014).

Facebook, a predominantly youth-oriented platform with over 56% of users under 34 (26.3% between 18-24) (Dixon, 2023a), presents intriguing opportunities for understanding civic engagement among young individuals. Its research could yield insights into collective activism (Cai & Marks, 2021), civic participation (Ferrucci et al., 2020), and political engagement (Kim et al., 2022; Lonkila & Jokivuori, 2022). Consequently, social media platforms, including Facebook, are emerging as new arenas for young citizens' political involvement, seen as a step towards improving democracy and inclusion (de-la-Garza-Montemayor et al., 2019; McInroy et al., 2019).

Young people tend to engage civically when they are motivated to voice and share their opinions (Hong & Kim, 2020), such as during events like the pandemic, where they share information on COVID-19 or engage in virtual volunteering (Yazdani et al., 2022). It is important to note that this new form of youth engagement through social media platforms complements traditional offline political participation rather than replacing it (Bouliane & Theocharis, 2020).

Although we have found several studies that study the role of Facebook for civic engagement (Bouchillon, 2018; Chan, 2016; Ferrucci et al., 2020; Haro-de-Rosario et al., 2016; Klein & Muis, 2019; Lenzi et al., 2015; Smith & Graham, 2019;

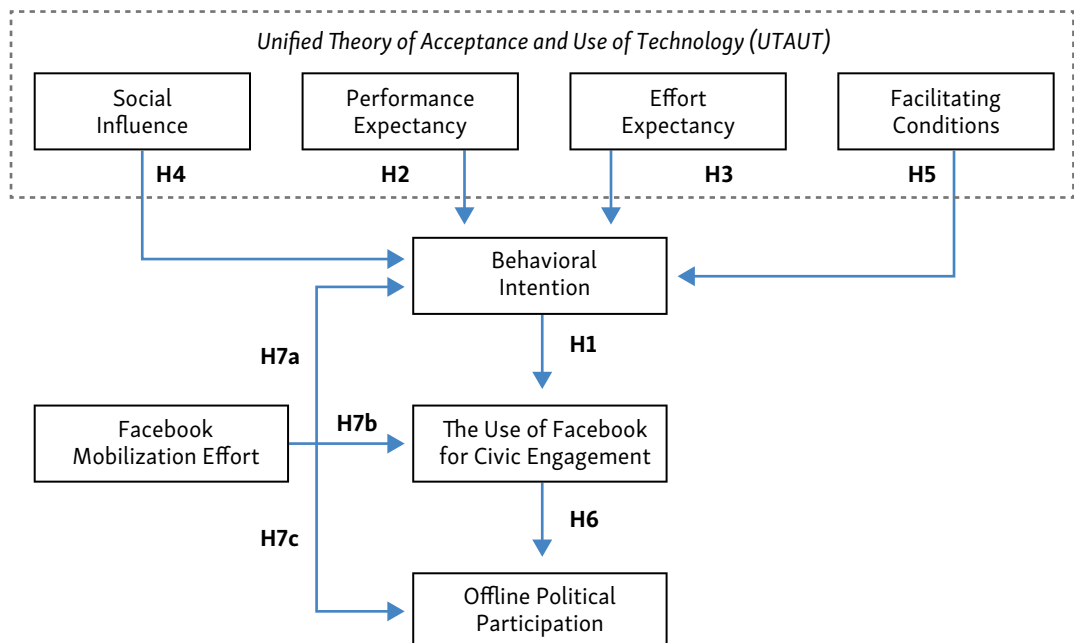
Warren et al., 2015; Yuan et al., 2019), this is one of the first empirical studies to understand student's beliefs about using Facebook for civic engagement and political participation.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research model, hypotheses, and structural model specification**

Research based on the UTAUT model (Venkatesh et al., 2003) looks into the adoption of various technologies by young people including health apps (Bäuerle et al., 2022; Vinnikova et al., 2020), Internet voting (Agbesi, 2020), technology in healthcare (Kaur et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020), food delivery apps (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021), voice-based assistants (Dogra & Kaushal, 2021), education (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Elareshi et al., 2022), and SMPs (Borrero et al., 2014a; Mohd Suki et al., 2022; Bhuiyan et al., 2021; Olamijuwon & Odimegwu, 2021).

In the proposed research model (figure 1), the four UTAUT constructs are adapted to predict behavioral intentions in the context of SMP and civic engagement (Borrero et al., 2014a, 2014b). Social influence assesses the extent to which Facebook users believe their friends should use Facebook for civic engagement, performance expectancy measures the benefits users expect from using Facebook for civic participation, effort expectancy measures the ease of using Facebook for civic engagement, and facilitating conditions assess the support available to Facebook users for behaviors related to civic engagement.



**Figure 1. Proposed research model and the structural model specification**

Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, for university students, we propose:

*H1.* Intention to use Facebook for civic engagement will significantly predict its use.

*H2.* Facebook's performance expectancy will positively influence the intention to use Facebook for civic engagement.

*H3.* The effort expectancy of Facebook will positively influence the intention to use Facebook for civic engagement.

*H4.* The social influence surrounding the use of Facebook will positively influence the intention to use Facebook for civic engagement.

*H5.* The facilitating conditions surrounding the use of Facebook will positively influence the intention to use Facebook for civic engagement.

We posit the novel proposition that online civic engagement among youth is linked to other offline forms of participation, and to find a positive, direct, and significant association between membership in a SMP and offline forms of mobilization (Chen, 2017; Conroy et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Harlow, 2012, Oser et al., 2013). Thus:

*H6.* The use of Facebook for civic engagement will be positively related to offline political participation.

Similarly, we also contend that young people's efforts to mobilize those around their social networks should be followed by the intention to use Facebook for civic engagement, and that using Facebook for civic engagement and offline political participation should be followed by action (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Oser et al., 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2009). Following the inverse logic of Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009), who consider that an act of expressive participation online must be followed by efforts in social networks to mobilize those around us, we defend that mobilization efforts through Facebook should strengthen that person's conviction, leading her/his to increase the intention to use Facebook for civic engagement, to use Facebook, or to demonstrate with more tangible actions in the offline domain. Thus, we pose the following hypotheses:

*H7.* Facebook mobilization effort will be positively related to (a) behavioral intention to use Facebook, (b) the use of Facebook for civic engagement, and (c) offline political participation.

To predict constructs presented in figure 1, we employed the PLS-SEM method (Hair et al., 2017), specifically Consistent Partial Least Squares Structural Equation

Modeling (PLSc-SEM) (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015), utilizing the R software (<https://www.r-project.org/>).

### **Data collection and specification of the measurement model**

This study uses a quantitative methodology based on the design, application and analysis of a questionnaire (<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24478.31043>) and focuses on university students in Spain, since they are the ones who can fully participate politically due to their age majority. The design was structured by closed and categorized questions with simple answers to obtain information about the latent and observed variables. All UTAUT constructs were measured using reflective indicators, where the latent variable indicators are not themselves a dimension of the meaning of the latent variable, but rather different expressions (Henseler et al., 2009). To ensure the reliability of the indicators used and their comparability with other studies, the items proposed in previous studies were considered in the formulation of the questions.

A total of 32 measurement items adapted from previous studies (Borrero et al., 2014a, 2014b; Chen, 2017, Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012) were carefully reformulated in the context of Facebook use related to civic engagement among university students, with response selections on a seven-point Likert scale. Two constructs were created or added: a Facebook mobilization effort index (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009) and an offline civic participation index (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Oser et al., 2013; Park & Kaye, 2017) based on participation in 11 activities ranged from 0 (no participation) to 11 (participation in different political activities).

To assess whether the questionnaire adequately or completely contained all the items necessary to represent the concept being measured, content validation required the participation of five university professors, all of whom are experts in the SEM technique. The first draft was validated through a pretest which seven experienced SMP users. After three rounds of revisions, the instrument was pilot tested with a sample of eighteen students randomly selected from the Universidad de Huelva, Spain.

The process for obtaining informed consent from participants included a clear explanation of the study purpose, potential risks, and ensuring voluntary participation without external pressure. Furthermore, all research was reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of the university department to which the main researcher belonged to ensure adherence to strict ethical standards, such as confidentiality, data protection, and consideration of potential adverse effects on participants.

Thus, the final questionnaire was administered in February 2020 in person to a non-probabilistic sample of 229 Spanish final year students from different degrees (Business Administration and Management, Finance and Accounting, Tourism, and Masters) of this public university, all of whom were Facebook users. The final sample size of the study consisted of 209 fully completed questionnaires.

Contact with the students for their participation in the questionnaire was made through the university teachers involved in the study, so access through the classroom is noteworthy. The questionnaire included four sections, namely sociodemographic data, social media platforms, participation and mobilization, and the use of Facebook as a means for civic engagement and political participation.

### **Data analysis, estimation, and model evaluation**

In this section we assess the quality of the PLS-SEM model to ensure that the results are reliable and valid. Table 1 provides a general overview of respondents' age, gender, and experience with SMPs. These user demographic and behavior results are similar to young people in the European Union (Dixon, 2023b).

The means and standard deviations of the constructs that are the focus of this study are shown in table 2. The highest mean was obtained for performance expectancy while the lowest one was offline political participation, indicating varying levels of importance and relevance of these constructs within the extended UTAUT model.

In our assessment of the model fit parameters (table 3), it is crucial to note that they were satisfactory, showing a well-fitting model (Hair et al., 2014). These positive results increase confidence in the robustness of our structural equation model. It is worth highlighting that the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) did not exceed the recommended threshold of 0.92, which is often considered as a benchmark for excellent model fit, but did exceed the commendable threshold of 0.90.

To ensure the reliability of our measurement model, we meticulously assessed the consistency of our indicators by examining the factor loadings. As part of this rigorous process, we decided to eliminate two indicators that did not meet the required standards for robustness and relevance. After this refinement, we re-estimated the model, and the results were highly reassuring. All remaining items had notable and statistically significant loadings on their respective constructs. These factor loadings had a range of 0.53 to 0.84, as shown in table 4. Importantly, these loadings far exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.500, as advocated by Hair and colleagues (2014). This result underscores the strong relationships between our measured variables and their underlying constructs, affirming the reliability of our measurement model.



Characteristics		Frequency	%
<b>Demographic</b>			
Gender	Female	127	61
	Male	82	39
Age	18-24	163	78
	25-26	46	22
<b>University degree</b>			
Bachelor	Business Administration	69	33
	Accounting	59	28
	Tourism	42	20
Master	Master in Business	39	19
<b>Facebook Experience</b>			
Facebook access at home	Yes	199	95
	No	10	5
Facebook usage per week	Above 7 hours	44	21
	Less than 7 hours	165	79
Facebook experience	Over 5 years	44	21
	Less than 5 years	165	79

**Table 1. Respondents data (N=209)**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Latent variable (ID)	Mean	Standard deviation
Effort expectancy (EE)	3.214	0.567
Performance expectancy (PE)	3.869	0.102
Social influence (SI)	3.198	0.635
Facilitating conditions (FC)	3.216	0.590
Behavioral intention (BI)	3.213	0.676
Facebook civic engagement (CE)	3.115	0.656
Facebook mobilization effort (ME)	3.284	0.167
Offline political participation (OP)	2.891	2.353

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Model fit index	Recommended value model	Results
Normed chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ )	<3.0	1.680 (=857.21/511)
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	Above 0.92	0.928
Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI)	Above 0.92	0.919
Root Mean Square error of Approximation (RMSEA)	<0.080 (with CFI of 0.92)	0.056

**Table 3. Results of fit indices***Source: Own elaboration.*

Latent variable (ID)	Number of items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
EE	4	0.64-0.82	0.82	0.83	0.53
PE	8	0.67-0.80	0.92	0.96	0.55
SI	5	0.77-0.84	0.90	0.93	0.67
FC	5	0.53-0.68	0.83	0.89	0.56
BI	5	0.70-0.84	0.90	0.86	0.52
CE	5	0.59-0.73	0.81	0.84	0.50
ME	1	1	1	1	1
OP			0.82		

**Table 4. Results of confirmatory factor analysis***Source: Own elaboration.*

Furthermore, our examination in table 4 unveiled another critical aspect of reliability: internal consistency. Each construct included in our model exhibited excellent internal consistency, as evidenced by both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values that exceed the generally accepted benchmark of 0.70, as outlined by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). This robust internal consistency underscores the stability and coherence of our constructs.

Moreover, our assessment of convergent validity at the item level yielded equally promising results. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded the notable threshold of 0.50 as established by Fornell and Larcker (1981). This result is a strong indicator of convergent validity and demonstrates that our measurement items do indeed converge with their respective constructs, underscoring the quality and effectiveness of our measurement model.

Latent variable (ID)	EE	PE	SI	FC	BI	CE	ME	OP
EE	<i>0.73</i>							
PE	0.59**	<i>0.74</i>						
SI	0.68**	0.62**	<i>0.82</i>					
FC	0.71**	0.66**	0.76**	<i>0.75</i>				
BI	0.67**	0.69**	0.74**	0.71**	<i>0.72</i>			
CE	0.48**	0.41**	0.49**	0.45**	0.44**	<i>0.71</i>		
ME	0.31**	0.33**	0.38**	0.38**	0.44**	0.56**	<i>1</i>	
OP	0.05	0.28**	0.17*	0.25**	0.15*	0.25**	0.15*	-

Note: Significance codes \* at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* at  $p < 0.01$ . The diagonal values in italics represent the square root of AVE. The below diagonal values are the coefficients of the Pearson correlation between two constructs.

**Table 5. Correlation matrix and square root of AVE (Fornell-Lacker criteria)**

Source: Own elaboration.

These results stress our commitment to ensuring the integrity of our research and confirm that our measurements accurately capture the underlying constructs we aim to investigate.

Finally, we can confidently assert discriminant validity is present because the AVE for each construct exceeds the squared correlation between that construct and every other construct (table 5). This means that each construct is more strongly related to its own set of items than to items of other constructs, which emphasizes the distinctiveness of each construct in our study.

Having confirmed the reliability and validity of our measurement model, we now focus on a more comprehensive evaluation of the structural model.

First, we delve into the algebraic sign that indicates whether the directions of these relations are consistent with our original hypotheses. With the exception of one case involving the relationship between facilitating conditions and intentions (H5), all other connections between constructs consistently retain the same algebraic sign as originally hypothesized. This remarkable consistency underscores the robustness of our theoretical framework.

Table 6 provides an illuminating picture of our results. Notably, behavioral intention is found to be a highly significant predictor of individuals' propensity to utilize Facebook for civic engagement (H1), as evidenced by a substantial beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.28. Moreover, the statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ) associated with this relationship underscores its empirical strength.

Considering social influence-intentions (H4), we observed an even more stronger relation, with a beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.51. Although the statistical significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ) is slightly lower than for behavioral intention, it is still indicative of a noteworthy relationship, highlighting the important role of social influence in shaping individuals' intentions regarding civic engagement.

Similarly, performance expectancy-intention (H2) exhibits a substantial and statistically significant relationship, with a beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.36 and a significance level ( $p < 0.01$ ) that reinforces its importance in influencing civic engagement intentions.

Meanwhile, effort expectancy-intention (H3) also plays a role, though somewhat less pronounced, with a beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.27 and a statistically significant association ( $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that ease of use, while influential, might not be as fundamental as performance expectancy and social influence in the formation of civic engagement intentions.

Interestingly, facilitating conditions (H5) appear as non-significant predictors of intentions, indicating that the environment or resources available for civic engagement may not exert a substantial direct influence on individuals' intentions in the context of our study.

Another significant finding relates to mobilization effort on Facebook. This factor emerges as a robust and highly significant predictor of intention (H7a) with a beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.13 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and also significantly predicts the use of Facebook for civic engagement (H7b) with a more substantial beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.44 ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, it does not seem to play a significant role in offline political participation (H7c).

Our results also reveal a noteworthy and positively significant relationship between online civic engagement and offline political participation (H6), supported by a beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.25 ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that individuals who actively express their political opinions via Facebook are more likely than their counterparts to engage in physical political actions, highlighting the intertwining of virtual and real-world civic engagement.

Finally, predictive power is evaluated with the R-squared of each endogenous latent variable, whose interpretation is analogous to regression. The model showed good fit (Hair et al., 2017) with an R-squared of 0.425 (moderate) for the variable use of Facebook for civic engagement, which means that the UTAUT constructs, through their effect on intention explain 42.5% of the use of Facebook for civic engagement; likewise for offline political participation, with 0.310 (moderate), while only 9% (weak) of the intention is explained by the UTAUT constructs (table 7).

Hypothesis	Structural path	SRW	Result
H2	PE→BI	0.36**	Supported
H3	EE→BI	0.27*	Supported
H4	SI→BI	0.51*	Supported
H5	FC→BI	-0.25	Not supported
H1	BI→CE	0.28**	Supported
H6	CE→OP	0.25*	Supported
H7a	ME→BI	0.13*	Supported
H7b	ME→CE	0.44**	Supported
H7c	ME→OP	0.01	Not Supported

Note: Significance codes \* at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* at  $p < 0.01$ . SRW = standardized regression weight.

**Table 6. Results of structural equation model (N=209)**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Latent variable	R2
Behavioral Intention	0.090
Facebook Civic Engagement	0.425
Offline Political Participation	0.310

**Table 7. R-squared (R2) of the endogenous variables**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Analysis of the PLS-SEM model shows a high degree of convergent and discriminant validity, as well as high substantial explanatory and predictive power. This makes the model a high-quality tool that provides both reliable and valid results. In essence, our thorough examination of the structural model uncovers intricate relationships among various constructs, offering valuable insights into the determinants of individuals' intentions and behaviors in the domain of civic engagement, specifically in the context of Facebook use.

## DISCUSSION

As emphasized by Lemay and colleagues (2019) and supported by various studies, including this one, the design of technology has a major impact on its acceptance and use by young people. User-friendly, interactive, and personalized technology that is tailored to the specific needs and interests of young people tends to be better adopted and used. This study supports the idea that technology that is perceived as practical and personally relevant is more likely to gain acceptance and

use among youth. Consequently, when designing technology for youth engagement, it is crucial to consider their unique requirements and interests while prioritizing user-friendliness and interactivity, much like the approach employed by Facebook.

Our results highlight the substantial impact of social influence on students' intentions to use Facebook for civic engagement. This concept is based on the fundamental idea that individual choices are interconnected, as exemplified by Bouchillon (2018). Among youth, technology acceptance and adoption are particularly influenced by the presence of peers and their positive feedback. These findings underscore the importance of integrating social influence and fostering positive feedback mechanisms when developing technologies for youth engagement, as emphasized by Naranjo-Zolotov and colleagues (2019).

Similarly, our study uncovers that in addition to the central role of social influence, performance expectancy, and effort expectancy also stand out as significant predictors of students' intentions to use Facebook for civic engagement. This corroborates the findings presented by Lenzi et al. (2015) and Borrero et al. (2014a), which underscore the multifaceted interplay of factors that influence students' involvement of social media platforms into students' civic participation. Thus, students are more likely to use Facebook for civic engagement when they perceive it as a facilitator of positive outcomes and find it convenient to use.

In contrast to the prevailing literature, which often posits that the Internet serves as a means to facilitate connective action by lowering the costs of online organization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), our results show that facilitating conditions did not emerge as a significant predictor of intentions, which may indicate that individuals are largely in control of Facebook use due to its ease of access on the Internet, as noted by Walsh & White (2007).

Recent studies have suggested that younger Facebook users may exhibit a heightened propensity for both online civic engagement endeavors (Boulianne et al., 2022; Tarman & Kilinc, 2022) and offline civic activities (Boulianne, 2020; Kittredge, 2022). In line with these trends, our research outcomes underscore that engagement on Facebook notably predicts participation in online civic engagement activities. This phenomenon may be attributed to the perception that young individuals feel a greater sense of safety and support within online civic communities, as suggested by McInroy and colleagues (2019).

Our results also show a noteworthy and positive association between engagement in online civic activities and subsequent offline political involvement, in line with Piatak and Mikkelsen (2021). This confirms previous research on the impact of Facebook groups on political participation (Conroy et al., 2012; Ferrucci

et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Valenzuela et al., 2009) and underscores that digital engagement can serve as a precursor to real-world civic action. It is important to acknowledge that civic engagement encompasses individual forms that can serve as precursors to political participation, as stated by Ekman and Amnå (2012), thus highlighting the transformative potential of online behaviors into offline civic actions (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020).

Furthermore, Facebook serves as a valuable platform to mobilize social networks (Ellison et al., 2007; Hargittai, 2007), thus establishing a potent indirect pathway leading to offline participation. Consequently, Facebook emerges as a contemporary tool that has the potential to mobilize people and, therefore, drive social engagement in the online sphere. However, it is essential to recognize that mobilization efforts, while influential, are not sufficient by themselves to initiate the process of political participation, which includes both formal political engagement and activism. These mobilization efforts should ideally serve as a robust indirect means of transforming civic engagement into more tangible and impactful actions, such as voting for formal political participation or engaging in demonstrations as a form of activism.

However, despite the substantial influence of Facebook mobilization efforts on both the intention to engage with Facebook for civic purposes and its actual use, it did not show a significant impact on offline political participation. It is noteworthy that the younger demographic demonstrates a greater tendency to seek information, support, and resources online, compared to their offline counterparts (McInroy et al., 2019). Accordingly, the Facebook environment is often characterized as a small world network, implying its potential as a valuable tool for fostering mobilization processes that facilitate civic engagement just among its participants, as elucidated by Smith and Graham (2019) and Yuan and colleagues (2019).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Technology has deeply transformed citizens' daily routines, and digital media now serves as a new tool for socialization. Within this context, political socialization occurring on the Internet, specifically among youth, is of significant importance. As social media platforms (SMPs) gain prominence as social change agents, it is crucial to explore whether young people intend to employ them for civic engagement and, if so, to understand this process. The use of these technologies has the potential to enhance citizen mobilization and participation by providing a platform for connection, information sharing, and collective action. However, the existing literature presents contradictory findings, with some studies reporting positive impacts of SMPs on citizen engagement, while others highlight negative effects.

A recurring theme in various studies is that SMPs are effective in expanding the reach and visibility of citizen mobilization and participation efforts. Platforms like Facebook enable users to connect with a diverse and broad audience, which amplifies the visibility of such initiatives and increases the possibilities for individual participation. Moreover, SMPs offer a solution to traditional barriers such as geographic distance and limited access to conventional media. Facebook, for example, facilitates connections regardless of physical location and provides access to information and resources that are not readily available through traditional media. However, it should be noted that Facebook's impact on citizen mobilization and participation is not uniformly positive. It can inadvertently foster echo chambers and polarized discourse. This implies that Facebook may reinforce existing social and political divisions, preventing people from engaging with those who have differing perspectives, and consequently hindering collective action and civic participation.

This study aimed to explore the political socialization of young people through Facebook and their engagement in both online and offline political participation. It sought to investigate whether Facebook serves as a catalyst for political involvement among young people. The study included a questionnaire administered to young university students at a Spanish public university, resulting in a final sample of 209 respondents. The choice of this demographic is justified by the fact that they have reached the legal voting age, granting them full political rights.

The results show that young Spaniards are well-acquainted with Facebook and use it regularly, considering it a valuable tool for civic engagement. Thus, digital technologies serve as a gateway for young people to engage in public affairs and stay informed about political reality. In particular, the study confirmed that expectation and social influence are the variables that most influence students' intentions to use Facebook for civic engagement. It appears that personal connections and close ties to active participants increase students' likelihood of engagement, although more research is needed to distinguish between strong and weak ties. Surprisingly, the variable most affecting offline political participation was the use of Facebook for civic engagement rather than Facebook mobilization effort.

Efforts to mobilize contacts on Facebook significantly increase young people's intention to use the platform for civic engagement, such as raising awareness of civic issues. These mobilization efforts also improve the quality and frequency of civic engagement on social networks. Effective mobilization provides information, resources, and participation opportunities, which increases the likelihood that mobilizers will use Facebook for civic engagement. However, it should be noted that mobilization on Facebook does not impact offline civic engagement. Ideally, effective



Facebook mobilization would translate into greater offline civic participation, yet young people appear more comfortable committing to online actions.

This civic socialization experience on Facebook seems to be a precursor to engage in politics. Many Spanish university students participate in cyberactivism but are less involved in offline political actions. However, it is important to recognize that online and offline participation are not entirely separate. Consumption of political information and online activism on Facebook can influence subsequent offline participation, such as voting. Further research, covering different geographic regions and SMP, is needed to substantiate these findings.

Encouraging youth engagement through technology depends on various factors, including individual traits, technology design, and social influence. To effectively promote youth participation, technology must be inclusive, interactive, user-friendly, and tailored to young people's unique interests and needs. Moreover, it must be perceived as practical and personally relevant, while fostering opportunities for social influence and positive feedback. Consequently, researchers and practitioners should carefully consider these elements when implementing and advocating technology for youth engagement.

Finally, Facebook is a potent platform for disseminating information, sharing ideas, and building networks and communities. Encouraging civic engagement among university students on this platform enables them to connect with like-minded peers, collectively address societal issues, and enrich their communities. This active involvement promises to foster a more engaged, responsible, and participatory citizenry, crucial to instigating social change. Engaged citizens are more likely to actively participate in their communities' economic and social life, contributing to sustainable and inclusive societies. However, as highlighted by Calvo (2022), it is crucial to critically assess the potential of Facebook and similar online platforms as drivers of social change, considering the complex economic and political contexts in which they operate and acknowledging the persistent disparities in power dynamics that determine these platforms' impact on society.

While it is essential to acknowledge the inherent limitations of our study, the analysis conducted has provided valuable insights into the potential of SMPs as instruments for driving social change.

#### **AUTHOR DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

No competing financial interests exist.

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