



Young People's Social Engagement: Personal Motivations and Social Networks

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Abstract This study focuses on the role of individuals' social networks and motivations in predicting their intention to participate socially. In an online survey, university students ($N = 263$) estimated the likelihood of their future participation in several types of civic and political activity and evaluated their possible motivations. Participants also indicated approximately how many of their social contacts were already involved in each type of participation, with this measure being used to calculate their degree centrality in social networks. Multiple linear regression analyses revealed that motivations and social contacts were significant predictors of intention to engage in most forms of civic and political activity studied. Social contacts were more decisive in predicting political than civic participation. We also found that personal motivations mediated the relationship between social contacts and intention to participate in all cases except joining a political party. We discuss the results in light of their theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords Civic participation · Political participation · Motivations · Social networks

The manuscript has associated data in a data repository: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3693701>.

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Introduction

Young people's social engagement is crucial to the future of democratic societies, and from the 1990s onward, academic and sociopolitical interest in their participation has increased. This interest is motivated by the fact that participation results in several important benefits. For example, it promotes social change, helps improve social, environmental, economic and political conditions, strengthens ties between citizens and their sense of belonging to the community, and enhances collective and individual well-being (see Cicognani et al., 2015).

Given the importance of young people's social participation, it is crucial to determine which factors foster engagement in general, and which are associated with different types of participation. The present study focuses on the role played by personal motivations and social networks in predicting intention to participate in different types of civic and political activity among young people in Spain.

Depending on the type of social participation under analysis, research to date has focused mainly on either personal motivations or the role of social networks. However, to the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have explored the impact of both factors simultaneously.

Social Participation

Conceptualising social participation is no easy task. Firstly, there is no consensus among researchers regarding which activities actually constitute it; and secondly, the concept has been used with so many different meanings that its definition has become less precise (Serrat et al., 2017).

In an attempt to clarify the concept, some authors differentiate between civic participation and political

participation (Serrat et al., 2017). Civic participation refers to actions that connect people, although not with the intention of promoting social change. This type of participation has also been defined as an activity aimed at helping others, working towards the common good or solving a community problem (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014). For its part, political participation refers to actions aimed at influencing political outcomes or generating social change.

Some authors believe that these two types of participation are fostered by different factors (Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2015). For example, Pavlova and Silbereisen (2015) have found that family support and support from community services impact civic and political participation differently, and Neufeind et al. (2014) have found that although the direct effects of justice dispositions on volunteering and political participation are significant, their impact on volunteering are quite weak.

In this study, we focus on five different types of social participation. Civic participation is represented by (1) being a member of an association with social goals (membership of an association); and (2) being a volunteer. Political participation is represented by (3) being a member of a political party; (4) being a member of a popular unity candidacy or an assembly-based political organisation (including certain recently constituted Spanish political movements; see, for example, Giménez, 2015); and (5) being a militant activist in a social movement.

Motivations

While the role of individual motivations in predicting volunteering has been the subject of much attention (Clary & Snyder, 1991), fewer studies have focused on this variable in relation to other forms of engagement, such as collective action or political participation (e.g. Cicognani & Mazzoni, 2013; Costantini & Valenty, 1996; Russell, 2011). Moreover, research to date lacks the solid theoretical framework needed to guide the analysis and facilitate comparisons between studies or between different types of social participation.

The functional approach to volunteers' motivations (Clary & Snyder, 1991) argues that people may hold the same attitudes and engage in apparently similar behaviours for very different reasons. Although this approach was originally developed to study motivation among volunteers, Snyder and Omoto (2000) have suggested that the model may also be used to explain motivation in relation to other forms of social participation.

The motivations identified by this theory (Clary et al., 1998) are: values (opportunity to express personal values related to humanitarian concerns), career (professional or

work-related achievements), social (opportunity to adapt to the requirements of a particular social group), understanding (acquiring new experiences and exercising knowledge and skills), enhancement (personal growth and development), and protective (reducing negative feelings or addressing personal problems).

While the model has been found to explain a substantial part of engagement in volunteering, it may overlook some important motivations that are relevant for other types of social participation. For instance, social motivation seems only to encompass those aspects linked to the need to socially adjust and adapt, i.e. the need to respond to the expectations of others and concerns over social rewards and punishments (Smith et al., 1956). However, it does not reflect the proactive need to expand one's network of contacts and seek interactions with likeminded others. Studying this facet may enrich our understanding of motivations for social participation.

Moreover, including the need to act consistently with one's self-concept may also help broaden the spectrum of motivations for social participation. Some studies focusing on collective action have demonstrated the importance of this type of motivation (for example, Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2018; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). Similarly, models developed to explain collective action, such as SIMCA (Van Zomeren et al., 2008), attribute a central role to social identity as a motivating force promoting participation.

Current theoretical perspectives view identity as a social achievement in progress, and as such, as both a pathway to and a result of social relations (O'Toole et al., 2016). Social networks convey meanings (rituals and narratives, for example) that build and solidify identities (Passy, 2003; Somers, 1992). Similarly, individuals may develop a behavioural identity as 'the kind of person who engages in a particular action', which predicts intentions and behaviour more effectively than other motivational factors (Louis et al., 2016).

The present study takes into account the original motivations of values, career, understanding, enhancement and protective established by Clary et al. (1998), and incorporates self-concept motivation and a new version of social motivation that addresses the proactive need to expand one's network of contacts and seek interactions with likeminded others.

Social networks

Whereas the importance of social networks for collective action is widely recognised (Diani & McAdam, 2003), research exploring their influence on more individual forms of participation, such as volunteering, is less frequent. Nevertheless, several studies have confirmed the

importance of social networks in this sense. Below we summarise some findings related to social networks and different types of participation.

In relation to civic participation, research findings suggest that volunteers are frequently recruited by a member of their social network, with this being one of the main reasons why people start volunteering (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Tong et al. (2010) have shown that the size of an individual's personal social networks and the respect perceived in them have a positive impact on intention to help and the amount of time dedicated to volunteering. In a similar vein, Dávila (2017) found that volunteering among seniors is related to the structure of their social networks. Wang and Handy (2014) observed that informal social networks (family and friends) correlated positively with propensity to participate as volunteers. Paik and Navarre-Jackson (2011) found that heterogeneity of social networks predicted recruitment of volunteers.

Similar trends have been observed for political participation and collective action. For example, social network analysis has been used in the study of the role played by social ties in the recruitment of new members in social movements (Diani & McAdam, 2003). Likewise, Tindall (2002) linked the structure of personal social networks to participation in social movements. Crossley and Sheffield (2012) addressed the importance of social networks in the generation of collective action at university. Fuist et al. (2018) examined how an individualistically oriented lifestyle movement can create the potential for collective action by forging social networks of likeminded individuals. Finally, McClurg (2003) observed that the effect of social interaction on political participation is contingent on the amount of political discussion that occurs in social networks.

O'Toole et al. (2016) highlighted the need to study social networks, arguing that social participation such as volunteering exists in a 'thick' network of social relations and cannot, therefore, be reduced to individual motivations or viewed as a mere matter of individual choice. Although the functional approach takes the social aspect into account, it is articulated around a model of individual choice. This limits the model's explanatory power, because human actions and choices undoubtedly take place in social structures that constrain and enable individual activity. Without structural factors providing opportunities for participation, people would remain inactive (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993).

Moreover, social networks seem to have two additional functions: they may motivate engagement by providing structures of meaning that build and reinforce identities, and they also shape individuals' decisions regarding their degree of involvement (Passy, 2003).

Social networks also play an important role in creating social norms. Kashima et al. (2013) argue that people observe the behaviour of others in their social networks, and infer what is considered 'typical' in relation to community involvement. Social norms play a key role in explaining how people interpret and act in their social worlds, even though most individuals are unaware of their influence (Nolan et al., 2008).

Social network analysis method

The concepts and methodologies used to study the impact of social relationships on social engagement are diverse and include social support, social capital, social integration, evaluation of the support received, and frequency of contact with family, friends and others (see, for example, Okun & Michel, 2006). In relation to social capital, of particular interest are the works of Putnam (see, for example, Putnam, 2000), who distinguishes between bonding and bridging networks in order to analyse the influence of this construct. However, in general, previous research has focused mainly on the resources transmitted by, or obtained through, social relations, thereby perhaps losing sight of the net impact of the relational factor on social participation. The social network analysis method may compensate for this partial view, since it offers different concepts and new formulas for analysing several different phenomena, including social capital (Moody & Paxton, 2009; Paxton, 2002).

The present study therefore uses the social network analysis method, specifically Brandes' concept of positional dominance (2016a), which can be defined as a reconceptualisation of centrality in social networks (Brandes, 2016b). Scholars have developed the concept of centrality in order to understand the effects of social structure on human behaviour. The basic idea is that the more central a person is, the greater their degree of involvement with others in a social network (Tindall, 2002).

Although diverse measures of centrality have been developed, the simplest and most intuitive is degree centrality, which allows us to understand the implications of using centrality in our study. Applied to the context of our research, degree centrality represents an indicator of an individual's potential communication with socially engaged others. Degree centrality should be positively associated with frequency of interaction with socially engaged others, which in turn is important in the process of information dissemination and social pressure to participate socially (Tindall, 2002). It therefore reflects the extent to which the individual may be influenced by their socially engaged contacts.

In contrast with classic metrics of centrality (for example degree or betweenness centrality), which are

based on a one-dimensional concept that does not allow comparisons across multiple dimensions, the concept of positional dominance has the advantage of being a synthetic metric that enables several dimensions to be considered at the same time (in this case, the number of social contacts that a person has in each type of participation). Positional dominance is estimated by classifying individuals in accordance with multiple dimensions on an ordinal scale (Brandes, 2016a). Thus, an individual will have greater positional dominance when they exceed all others in the number of contacts in each of the dimensions (in this case, in each type of social participation). In sum, positional dominance could be interpreted as a way to measure a certain type of social status in terms of individuals' social contacts, or the quality/value of their relationships (Brandes, 2016b), but without having to map their entire social networks. Consequently, the value of the relationships that a person maintains with socially engaged others is synthesised into a single variable. A study by Dávila et al. (2020) has demonstrated the effectiveness of this concept for explaining the different roles played by social networks in men's and women's social participation.

Relationship between motivations and social networks

Although previous research has associated social networks with participation, only a few studies have addressed the processes that may intervene in or mediate this relationship (Tindall, 2002). However, certain psychosocial variables may explain how individuals' networks shape their social engagement. The present study examines whether personal motivations mediate the relationship between networks and intention to participate socially. As mentioned previously, the self-concept motivation seems to be closely associated with social networks. This idea is also supported by the perspective of social network analysis, specifically in terms of dissemination and social homogeneity (Álvarez-Hernández, 2016). However, no empirical evidence or theoretical framework exists regarding how other motivations may be related to social networks.

In light of the above, this study has two principal aims. Firstly, it seeks to analyse and compare the impact of both social networks and motivations on people's intention to participate socially (i.e. to engage in several types of civic and political activity). Given the difference between civic and political participation and the fact that each is fostered by different factors, Hypothesis 1 posits that differences will be found in the degree to which motivational indicators and positional dominance (indicator of social networks) influence intention to engage in these two types of activity.

Given that social networks are a powerful source of social participation with multiple functions, including identity formation and shaping the type of engagement (O'Toole et al., 2016; Passy, 2003), we assume that social relationship indicators will have a greater impact on participation than individual motivations. Thus, Hypothesis 2 posits that positional dominance indicators will be more important than motivational factors for explaining the likelihood of engaging in any of the types of civic and political activity analysed. Determining whether intraindividual (motivations) or social (networks) factors are more influential in predicting intention to initiate social participation is relevant not only from a theoretical standpoint, but from a practical perspective also, since it may guide strategies for fostering social participation among young people.

The second aim of the present study is to test the idea that personal motivations mediate the relationship between social networks and intention to participate. Based on the argument that identities are created and shaped through social relations, since social networks convey meaning that builds and solidifies identities (Passy, 2003; Somers, 1992), Hypothesis 3 posits that self-concept motivation will mediate the relationship between dominance indicators and social participation. We do not advance any further hypotheses regarding other types of motivation.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 263 university science and humanities students at a public university in Madrid, Spain. They were not engaged in any kind of civic or political activity; 63.5% were women, and 36.5% men. Ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, with a mean of 21.55 years (SD = 2.73).

Instruments

Likelihood of future engagement. On a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 'not likely' to 7 'very likely', participants estimated the likelihood of their engaging, in the near future, in five types of civic and political activity: (1) being a member of an association with social goals; (2) being a volunteer in a non-profit organisation; (3) being a member of a political party; (4) being a member of a popular unity candidacy or an assembly-based political organisation; and (5) being an activist in a social movement.

Motivations. An adaptation of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1998) was used to evaluate possible motivations for engaging in different types of civic and

political activity (see “[Appendix](#)”). The adaptation comprised 18 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘strongly agree’. The scales included were those described by the authors of the original questionnaire, although we adapted the social scale to refer need to expand one’s network of contacts and seek interactions with likeminded others.

Moreover, a new scale was included to evaluate the need to act consistently with one’s self-concept. A PC factor analysis with 7 factors replicated the original structure plus a new factor (77.79% of variance explained). The reliability value obtained for the self-concept scale (three items) was 0.83, while this value was 0.84 for understanding (three items), 0.82 for career (three items), 0.77 for protective (three items), 0.78 for enhancement (two items), 0.81 for values (two items) and 0.77 for social (two items). Scale scores resulted from averaging scores on the items belonging to each scale.

Social networks. Participants were asked to identify the approximate number of (1) family members, (2) friends, and (3) acquaintances (neighbours, co-workers, etc.) who were engaged in each of the five types of civic and political activity studied. Response options ranged from 0 (‘nobody’) to 10 (‘ten or more’). Based on these measures, the following positional dominance indicators were calculated: total indegree (index that considers all contacts engaged in any type of civic or political activity), political indegree (partial index that considers only those contacts engaged in political activities), and civic indegree (partial index that considers only those contacts engaged in civic activities).

Following Brandes’ concept of positional dominance (2016a), the criterion used for the first indicator was as follows: a participant has a lower score (position) if another participant has a greater number of contacts active in each and every one of the five types of participation. In other words, we consider individual [i] to have a higher degree centrality than individual [j] if individual [i] has greater number of contacts than individual [j] in all the dimensions (types of activity). In this case, individual [i] is considered to dominate individual [j]. We calculated the second and third indicators in accordance with this same principle, the only difference being that dominance was required only in either political or civic participation (as appropriate).

Thus, a participant had a better position or a higher score (higher indegree) when they dominated a larger number of people, i.e. surpassed many other individuals in each of the dimensions.

In sum, rather than using several unidimensional indicators (number of contacts per type of network according to type of participation), we used a synthetic positional dominance indicator to establish a participation ranking that took all different dimensions (i.e. types of activity) into account.

Procedure

Responses were collected through an online questionnaire in the spring of 2018. Participants were contacted during class time and selected using a non-probabilistic procedure. Prior to taking part, they were informed of the study’s aims and assured that their data would be treated with total confidentiality and their anonymity would be guaranteed. All participants signed an informed consent document and collaborated voluntarily. The online questionnaire was sent to 376 students, but only 263 answered (70% response rate). There were no missing responses, as participants were required to answer all items.

As regards the construction of the positional dominance indicators, data pertaining to relatives, friends and acquaintances were summed, and three mode 2 matrices were built, in which the rows represented participants and the columns types of participation. The first matrix contemplated all five types of social participation, the second only included the three types of political participation and the third only the two types of civic participation. In all three cases, positional dominance was calculated by applying the positional dominance module available in the Visone software package to these matrices. This resulted in the generation of mode 1 matrices (with both rows and columns representing participants) in which the dyadic relationship was ‘one participant is dominated by another participant’. The indegree for all nodes or participants was calculated on the basis of these three matrices. A more detailed description of the construction procedure can be found in Brandes (2016a).

Results

The IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software package was used for the analyses.

To fulfil the study’s first aim, descriptive and correlational analyses were conducted (see [Table 1](#)). Next, multiple regression analyses were performed, with different types of motivation and positional dominance indexes being included as predictors, and the likelihood of participation being included as the dependent variable (see [Table 2](#)). In all analyses we controlled for age and gender (coded as a dummy variable; male = 1, female = 0).

Estimations of the likelihood of engaging in different types of civic and political activity correlated significantly with each other. A more intense relationship was found between the two forms of civic participation (being a member of an association and volunteering), as well as between the different types of political participation, specifically between being a member of a political party and being a member of an assembly-based political

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the analysed variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Age																	
2. Gender	-.03																
3. Membership association	.14*	-.15*															
4. Volunteering	.26	-.37**	.48**														
5. Political party	.07	.04	.26**	.15*													
6. Assembly-based organisation	.10	-.06	.38**	.32**	.64**												
7. Activism	.11	-.00	.46**	.44**	.41**	.55**											
8. M. Values	.00	-.16**	.42**	.48**	.07	.23**	.40**										
9. M. Understanding	-.01	-.26**	.38**	.45**	.05	.26**	.32**	.63**									
10. M. Protective	.00	-.09	.10	.20**	.13*	.09	.06	.20**	.21**								
11. M. Enhancement	-.03	-.23**	.34**	.36**	.10	.19**	.25**	.54**	.48**	.50**							
12. M. Career	.13*	-.19**	.24**	.20**	.10	.08	.19**	.23**	.39**	.31**	.31**						
13. M. Social	.07	-.23**	.36**	.36**	.12*	.31**	.35**	.50**	.59**	.36**	.45**	.35**					
14. M. Self-concept	.04	-.20**	.38**	.44**	.15*	.30**	.32**	.50**	.48**	.36**	.49*	.33**	.63**				
15. Total indegree	.04	-.08	.27**	.18**	.18**	.20**	.24**	.18**	.25**	.10	.15*	.15*	.23*	.24**			
16. Civic indegree	-.01	-.13*	.32**	.27**	.05	.12*	.20**	.26**	.33*	.00	.15*	.20*	.29**	.32**	.80**		
17. Political indegree	.08	.01	.22**	.12*	.26**	.24**	.26**	.11	.16**	.09	.09	.05	.15*	.15*	.87**	.50**	
Mean	21.55	-	4.25	4.75	2.70	2.90	3.37	5.24	4.95	2.53	4.00	3.74	3.77	3.26	2.1	.38	.35
SD	2.73	-	1.69	1.88	1.71	1.70	1.84	1.48	1.44	1.39	1.64	1.55	1.63	1.52	.19	.27	.20

*p < .05; **p < .01

Table 2 Summary of the regression analysis for each type of social participation

Variables	B	SE B	β
<i>Membership association</i>			
Age	.08	.03	.13*
Gender	– .16	.19	– .04
M. Values	.32	.07	.28**
Civic indegree	1.18	.35	.18**
M. Self-concept	.18	.07	.16**
R ²			.27
<i>Volunteering</i>			
Age	.03	.03	.05
Gender	– 1.00	.20	– .25**
M. Values	.32	.08	.25**
M. Self-concept	.24	.07	.19**
M. Understanding	.17	.08	.13*
R ²			.37
<i>Political party</i>			
Age	.02	.03	.04
Gender	.20	.21	.05
Political indegree	2.55	.57	.30**
M. Self-concept	.18	.07	.16*
Civic indegree	– .92	.46	– .14*
R ²			.10
<i>Assembly-based organisation</i>			
Age	.04	.03	.06
Gender	.05	.20	.01
M. Social	.19	.07	.18*
Political indegree	1.51	.48	.18**
M. Self-concept	.17	.08	.15*
R ²			.15
<i>Activism</i>			
Age	.05	.03	.08
Gender	.33	.21	.08
M. Values	.36	.07	.29**
Political indegree	1.74	.49	.19**
M. Social	.21	.07	.19**
R ²			.24

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

organisation. Activism was found to have a similar relationship with all types of social participation.

Most motivations correlated with each other to some extent, although never so much as to pose a collinearity problem. All motivations were associated with likelihood of becoming a volunteer, although not all were significantly associated with other types of social participation.

In relation to positional dominance indicators, due to the way in which they were created, the total index correlated strongly with the partial ones. Correlations between all

positional dominance indicators and all types of social participation were significant, with the exception of the correlation between civic indegree and likelihood of joining a political party. As regards partial indicators, civic indegree was more closely associated with likelihood of civic participation, while political indegree correlated more strongly with likelihood of political participation. In terms of the relationship between positional dominance indicators and motivations, total indegree and civic indegree correlated positively with all motivations, with the exception of protective motivation.

Moreover, age correlated with both career motivation and likelihood of joining an association. Gender was associated with both forms of civic participation, all motivations except protective motivation, and civic indegree.

Next, we conducted multiple regression analyses, including the control variables (age and gender) in the first block. The rest of the predictor variables were included in the second block, using the stepwise method. Given the close correlations observed between total indegree and political and civic indegrees, we chose to use the stepwise regression method because it is a good option when collinearity is a problem. Table 2 presents the final regression models.

In all cases, both positional dominance indicators and motivations were found to be significant predictors of intention to participate, with the exception of volunteering, which was predicted only by motivations.

Values motivation was the strongest predictor of civic participation and activism, and self-concept motivation was a significant predictor of both types of civic participation, as well as two types of political participation (joining a political party and participating in an assembly-based organisation). Finally, social motivation significantly predicted political participation, specifically activism and engagement in an assembly-based organisation.

Civic indegree significantly predicted membership of an association and joining a political party. Political indegree significantly predicted all types of political participation.

The percentage of variance explained by the proposed models ranged from 37 to 10%. The lowest variance explained was for likelihood of joining a political party, and the highest was for likelihood of volunteering.

In relation to the control variables, age significantly predicted being a member of an association and gender (specifically, being female) predicted volunteering.

In order to gain a clearer picture of the relationship between personal motivations, social network indicators and social engagement, we examined whether personal motivations mediated the relationship between social networks and intention to participate. We performed multiple mediation analyses using Model 4 in the PROCESS macro

(Hayes, 2013). The dependent variable was intention to engage in a specific type of civic or political activity (e.g. volunteering). We conducted two mediation analyses for each type, entering the civic indegree positional dominance indicator in the first model, and political indegree in the second. We entered all motivations simultaneously as mediator variables and controlled for sociodemographic variables by including age and gender as covariates. These analyses assumed that the independent variable influenced the mediator variables and ultimately, through them, the dependent variable. Multiple mediation estimates total indirect effect in order to determine whether an overall effect exists (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Moreover, it is possible to determine to what extent specific variables mediate the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable (in our case, social networks and intention to participate), depending on the presence of other mediators in the model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Table 3 presents the significant indirect effects found.

The total indirect effects found indicated that individual motivations mediated the effects of civic and political indegree on all types of participation, except for joining a political party. We also found that, in the case of engagement in an assembly-based organisation, only the overall indirect effect of motivation was significant. In contrast, values motivation was found to be a significant individual mediator of the impact of social networks on intention to join an association, start volunteering, and become an activist. Moreover, in the case of volunteering, self-concept motivation also acted as a significant mediator between

positional dominance indicators (social networks) and intention to participate.

Discussion

The aims of this study were to verify the role played by motivations and social networks in predicting intention to engage in different types of political and civic activity, and to explore the extent to which personal motivations mediate the relationship between social networks and intention to participate. In both cases, the role of social networks was measured using the concept of positional dominance (Brandes, 2016a).

The findings largely confirmed our first hypothesis, since civic and political participation were explained by different factors. For example, while the estimated likelihood of becoming a volunteer was predicted only by motivations, positional dominance was the strongest predictor of joining a political party.

Concerning Hypothesis 2, the evidence obtained (see the variables included in the regression models and β values) does not fully support the idea that social contacts are more important than motivations as predictors of social participation, since it indicates that both play a significant role in determining future engagement.

Another significant finding was that the overall social network indicator (positional dominance of all socially engaged contacts) was not as influential as the positional dominance of those contacts who were engaged in the

Table 3 Summary of mediation analysis to identify indirect effects between social networks and social engagement

VI	VD	Indirect effect	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Civic indegree	Membership association	Total	.88	.21	.48	1.31
		M. Values	.30	.17	.01	.68
Political indegree	Membership association	Total	.56	.22	.14	1.01
Civic indegree	Volunteering	Total	.94	.24	.46	1.42
		M. Self-concept	.41	.20	.06	.85
		M. Values	.44	.15	.15	.77
Political indegree	Volunteering	Total	.75	.26	.22	1.24
		M. Self-concept	.29	.17	.01	.68
		M. Values	.28	.15	.02	.63
Civic indegree	Political party	–	–	–	–	–
Political indegree	Political party	–	–	–	–	–
Civic indegree	Assembly-based organisation	Total	.75	.22	.33	1.24
Political indegree	Assembly-based organisation	Total	.47	.19	.12	.89
Civic indegree	Activism	Total	1.07	.25	.58	1.58
		M. Values	.42	.16	.13	.76
Political indegree	Activism	Total	.55	.23	.10	1.04
		M. Values	.27	.15	.02	.63

specific type of social participation being predicted. For example, the higher an individual's positional dominance regarding political participation, the higher their estimate of the likelihood of their becoming an activist in the future. It therefore seems that specific contacts predict specific types of participation, although the mediation analysis also indicated that both contacts who engage in civic participation and those involved in political participation influence personal motivations for social engagement.

One surprising result was found in relation to political parties: the greater an individual's positional dominance regarding civic participation, the lower their estimated likelihood of joining a political party. This suggests that certain specific contacts may reduce the likelihood of engaging in certain other types of activity.

Regarding the role of motivations (see Table 4), the results of regression analyses revealed the importance of values, self-concept, understanding and social motivations. The findings regarding the role of values and understanding are consistent with those reported by previous research on volunteering (Chacón et al., 2017). Understanding motivation, focused on acquiring and/or improving knowledge, skills or experiences, has been found in previous studies to be the second most important motivation of volunteerism (Chacón et al., 2017), and was the third most powerful motivation in our case (see β values in Table 2). Moreover, our study expands previous research by showing that values motivation, namely the need to express personal humanitarian values, is not only the most important factor predicting volunteering, but also plays a key role in predicting membership of an association and activism.

In relation to the two new types of motivation included in this study, we found that motivation to be consistent with one's own self-concept correlated closely with all types of participation, and was a significant predictor of likelihood of future engagement. This is consistent with the idea that identity is linked to the development and performance of a certain role (Callero, 1985; Louis et al., 2016).

Social motivation, conceptualised in this study as the need to expand one's network of contacts and interact with likeminded others, was also a strong predictor of intention to participate, especially in the case of political engagement.

These results prompt us to question current reliance on the functional approach, since the findings of our study suggest that the spectrum of motivational functions may be much broader than that considered within this perspective. While it is true that this framework offers a useful structure for studying personal motivations, it may need to be reviewed or expanded, especially if used to explain forms of social engagement other than volunteering, a point made previously by Chacón et al. (2010), as well as by Vecina and Marzana (2019). Further research is therefore required to explore which other personal motivations may be relevant for different types of social participation.

As regards the idea that the influence of social networks on participation may be mediated by individual motivations, we did indeed find that self-concept motivation acted as a significant mediator in the case of likelihood of becoming a volunteer. This confirms our third hypothesis. Moreover, we found that values motivation mediated between networks and participation in the case of volunteering, membership of an association, and activism. Although we only advanced one specific hypothesis, we found broader support for the general thesis that motivations constitute an intraindividual mechanism linking the influence of social networks to participation. For example, with the exception of becoming a member of a political party, motivations mediated the impact of participants' civic and political indegree on intention to participate socially.

It is also important to consider the differences found between joining a political party and joining an assembly-based political organisation, as an alternative political organisation. Although both may be considered forms of political participation, they are nevertheless predicted by different factors.

Consistently with the findings reported by other studies, such as those by Dávila (2017), Paik and Navarre-Jackson (2011), Putnam (2000), and Tindall (2002), our results also highlight the importance of social relationships. In this study, positional dominance is considered a measure that reflects the extent to which the individual may be influenced by their socially engaged contacts (Tindall, 2002). As discussed previously, social networks may influence social participation through different pathways: playing an important role in the construction of identity, connecting potential activists to opportunities for participation,

Table 4 Summary of role of motivations in predicting different types of participation

Motivations	Social participation
Values	Membership association, volunteerism, activism
Self-concept	Membership association, volunteerism, political party, assembly-based organisation
Understanding	Volunteerism
Social	Assembly-based organisation, activism

influencing the definition of an individual's perceptions, which in turn impact their decision regarding their level of involvement, and underpinning the establishment of social norms. According to the focus norm approach (see, for example, Cialdini et al., 1991), injunctive norms reflect perceptions of what most others approve or disapprove of, and encourage action through reinforcements and punishments associated with a particular behaviour. Descriptive norms, on the other hand, are perceptions of whether other people are really engaging in that behaviour. This type of norm motivates action by reporting on what is considered effective or adaptive in a particular context. Thus, social participation by social contacts may serve as a descriptive norm that stimulates an individual's own social engagement.

Although age and gender were controlled for, motivations and social networks made a significant predictive contribution to explaining different types of social participation.

One possible limitation of this study is that it relied on estimations of likelihood rather than on a measure of real participation. However, as theories of reasoned action and planned behaviour state, the prediction of a behaviour is mediated by the intention to engage in said behaviour, and we can expect participants' evaluation of the likelihood of their future engagement to be an adequate proxy of such behaviour. Chacón et al. (2007) and Greenslade and White (2005) highlighted the important role played by intent in civic participation. Another limitation is that the sample cannot be considered representative of young Spanish people or university students in general, meaning that the results cannot be generalised to these populations. Nevertheless, the sample does enable us to identify regularities and behavioural trends, which may be tested by future research.

There are also several limitations concerning the methodological use of social network analysis. For instance, due to our efforts to make answering easier and to simplify the data collection process, no name generator was used when gathering relational data (Neal & Watling, 2017). Another possible limitation is the number of contacts studied. The data collection instrument established a maximum threshold of 10 for those cases in which participants had more than that number of contacts. This may have affected the calculation of the positional dominance indicators, thereby introducing some bias into the results. Finally, the choice of the positional dominance concept for analysing the role of social networks may also be debatable when compared with other classic methods. Positional dominance was used as a summary indicator that classified participants in accordance with their number of contacts, and also considered not only the contacts reported by one individual, but also those reported by others in the sample.

This was done not only for one single dimension, but for several dimensions at the same time (in this case, several types of participation). This indicator therefore has added value in comparison with the mere calculation of the sum of all the individual's contacts, since it provides a relative measurement of the contacts reported by others, rather than just an estimation in absolute terms. We believe this method is more useful for specifying the relevance or magnitude of people's relationships, as well as the specific nature of these relationships, since an individual may have many contacts distributed across several domains of participation, or many contacts in just one domain.

Finally, the use of positional dominance is consistent with the methods employed in other recent studies, such as the one by Bringmann et al. (2019), who attempted to overcome some of the limitations of the classic metrics used in psychological contexts by (among other things) using new ones based on ranking.

Our results suggest some practical applications. For example, diverse entities may foster social participation among young people by creating spaces where those who are not socially engaged have an opportunity to meet others who are. In relation to volunteering, it would perhaps be more beneficial to focus on showing how engaging in this type of activity helps satisfy important personal needs, although our results also suggest that social contacts may shape these individual motivations. What appears to be an 'individual decision' is still influenced, albeit indirectly, by social networks (O'Toole et al., 2016).

Finally, future studies should consider the differential effect that strong ties (family and friends) and weak ties (acquaintances) may have on social participation, as suggested by Dávila et al. (2020), Lim (2008), and Son and Lin (2008).

In sum, citizens' social participation, and particularly that of young people, has numerous benefits not only at the personal level, but also for society as a whole. It is therefore essential to identify which factors promote it. This study advances our understanding of social participation by including an analysis of social networks, and comparing their impact with the role played by individual motivations.

Declarations

Ethical approval Faculty of Political Science and Sociology (UCM) does not have an Ethical Committee Approval at the moment. You can check this by contacting the Research Vice-dean (<https://politicasysociologia.ucm.es/equipo-gobierno>, leticia-maria.ruiz@cps.ucm.es.). We do not have an alternative or equivalent service to obtain approval in this regard. In any case, the authors declare and confirm that the APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (<https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/ethics-code-2017.pdf>) and Declaration of Helsinki (<https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki-ethical-principles-for-medical-research-involving-human-subjects/>) have been followed. The

publisher is reminded that the manuscript does not capture an experimental study, but rather a study that is based on the use of a survey, where participants were previously informed about its objectives, signed an informed consent, collaborated voluntarily, and the anonymity of their responses was ensured. The study had no implications for public health or general welfare.

Appendix: Adaptation of the Volunteer Functions Inventory

Social

Being with people who have the same concerns as me

Relating to other socially engaged or active people

Understanding

Learning things through direct experience that involves social participation

Gaining a new perspective on things

Learning more about a specific cause

Enhancement

Feeling calmer and more at peace

Feeling better about myself

Protective

Forgetting about my own problems

Feeling less alone

Helping myself to solve my own personal problems

Career

Exploring different career options

It may be useful in my professional life

Improving my résumé

Values

Lessening injustice and the suffering of others

Providing support and assistance to those in need

Self-concept

Because this activity or similar ones are an important part of my life

Because this activity or similar ones are an important part of myself

Because it is part of my lifestyle

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