
Participation of young people in online social communities: an exploration of attitudes among university students in a case study in Spain

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the different dimensions of online citizen participation for the purpose of delving into the types of engagement that are being developed in order for citizens to benefit from the opportunities offered by the Internet. A self-administered survey has been carried out with 420 students from a Spanish public University (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos) from its five campuses in Madrid. A typology of attitudes has been developed, firstly with factor analysis, and then with a varimax rotation. Moreover, a hierarchical linear regression has been applied in order to discover the variables that might predict the typology of participation. The study shows that online participation is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple personal and social factors. The results have revealed three points of view: 1. Scepticism toward the ability to exert influence; 2. Social networks as a channel for maintaining social contact and expressing opinions; and 3. Capability of empowering users. Certain attitudes toward social networks can predict online participatory behaviour in different types of profiles on these networks. Furthermore, age does not affect online participation, and gender only has an influence on sports and media profiles.

Keywords: online participation, attitudes, motivations, young people, social network, Internet.

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