# Beyond Social Norms: Exploring the Drivers of Youth's Political Participation Via Social Media

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## Abstract

This study examines the factors driving online political participation among young adults by integrating the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Civic Voluntarism Model. Structural equation modelling was applied using survey data from 236 young adults to analyse the relationships between attitudes, subjective norms, psychological engagement, political interactions, and resource availability. The findings indicate that attitudes and psychological engagement—comprising political interest, efficacy, and involvement—are the primary drivers of online political participation. In contrast, subjective norms and resource availability have no significant effect, suggesting that online engagement is primarily self-motivated rather than influenced by social expectations or material constraints. Furthermore, political interactions shape subjective norms, but these norms do not significantly impact participation intentions. This study contributes to understanding youth political engagement in digital environments by demonstrating that intrinsic psychological factors outweigh external influences. The findings have practical implications for strategies aimed at increasing youth political participation through social media, emphasising the need to foster political interest and efficacy rather than relying on peer influence or resource provision. By refining existing models of political engagement, this research provides a clearer framework for understanding and enhancing youth participation in democratic processes through digital platforms.

## 1- Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) play a significant role in youth political engagement, serving as primary sources of political information and direct channels for interaction with other users, media, and political figures [1, 2]. Political actors increasingly leverage SNS for targeted communication campaigns due to their low cost and high engagement potential [3–5]. Despite low levels of offline political participation, young adults demonstrate high online engagement rates, suggesting that SNS may facilitate new, accessible forms of political expression [6, 7]. A notable example is Obama's successful online campaign aimed at youth mobilisation [8].

Online political participation encompasses various activities, including online polls and micro-blogging, offering new forms of activism and engagement distinct from traditional offline political participation [9, 10]. The literature shows mixed findings regarding how online political activity may translate into real-world political actions. For instance, some studies show that this activity may translate into offline civic behaviours [2, 11], and others indicate that selective

exposure to online political information may discourage offline engagement or contribute to greater incivility and polarisation [12, 13]. In this study, we examine the factors driving youth political participation via SNS, moving beyond the influence of social norms to explore additional mechanisms that shape online political engagement.

While previous research has examined the role of social norms in shaping online political engagement among youth, there remains a critical gap in understanding the broader set of psychological and structural factors that drive participation beyond normative influences. Much of the existing literature has focused on the persuasive power of peer influence and perceived social expectations in motivating political expression online [14, 15]. However, fewer studies have explored the interplay between individual psychological engagement, resource availability, and personal attitudes shaping youth political participation on social media. Moreover, conflicting findings regarding the translation of online engagement into offline political behaviour suggest that additional mechanisms, such as political efficacy and intrinsic motivation, warrant closer examination. Some studies indicate that political efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to influence political outcomes, enhances both online and offline participation [16]. In contrast, others suggest that online engagement alone may not necessarily foster offline activism [17]. This study moves beyond a normative perspective to incorporate a more comprehensive framework that considers both individual-level psychological drivers and structural enablers of online political participation among young adults to address this gap.

Two theories are combined into one single theoretical model to investigate the factors driving online political participation among young adults: the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) [18] and the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) [19]. Through a survey administered to young adults in a European country (ages 18-30), constructs related to attitudes, subjective norms, psychological engagement, social interactions, and resource accessibility are measured. The proposed theoretical model is evaluated using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), allowing us to assess complex relationships between these predictors and online political engagement. The findings indicate that psychological engagement (comprising political interest, efficacy, and involvement) and positive attitudes are significant drivers of young adults' intentions to participate politically on SNS. In contrast, resources and subjective norms showed limited influence, suggesting that online participation among youth is largely self-motivated rather than externally driven.

This study makes three contributions to the literature. First, combining the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) introduces a nuanced model of online political engagement specific to young adults, integrating both psychological and social predictors. Second, it highlights the influence of psychological engagement and attitudes, informing strategies to foster democratic participation among youth through digital platforms and addressing gaps in understanding the motivational factors behind online political expression. Third, it provides practical insights into the potential of SNS as platforms for democratic engagement and civic mobilisation.

The following Section describes the theoretical model of youth online participation in detail. Section 3 discusses the methodological approach, including data collection, validation, and analyses, before discussing the results in Section 4. Finally, a conclusion with a brief reflection of the implications and possible future directions is presented in Section 5.

## 2- Research Model and Hypothesis Building

The TRA [18, 20] serves as the model's backbone and explains political participation in terms of behavioural intention, while the CVM [19] provides a robust explanation of the social dynamics that underpin the norms and psychological factors underlying political attitudes and subjective norms. By integrating these models, we capture both the individual decision-making processes driving political engagement and the broader social influences that reinforce or challenge such behaviours. Although this study is not the first to integrate the TRA with the CVM to explain new forms of political participation [21], it is the first one that links psychological engagement explicitly to political interactions and attitudes in online environments such as social media and SNS. This combination allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how social and cognitive factors interact to shape youth political participation in digital spaces, where traditional offline political behaviours may be redefined through online discourse and network effects.

### 2-1- Theory of Reasoned Action Components

Previous studies provide support for the proposition that intention is a necessary precursor to action [21, 22]. Intention to use SNS for online political participation is defined here as a deliberate plan or decision to engage in that behaviour, suggesting that the intention to engage in political action is the lynchpin to online political participation. Previous studies found evidence that behavioural intention leads to the actual online political participation [23] and in the context of selfie-posting behaviour [24]. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H1: The higher the young adults' intentions to use social media for political participation, the higher the frequency of social media use.*

The TRA depicts the individual as a rational actor who intends to engage in a behaviour based on personal benefit [18]. A person's subjective norms about a behaviour – in this case, online political participation, are based on their

perceptions of how appropriate it is in the eyes of others. These result in normative beliefs about whether they should perform the behaviour or not. Normative beliefs are composed of a referent norm (how does another person see my social media posts?) combined with motivations to comply with referent norms (how valuable is that person's approval to me?). Previous studies have found that subjective norms significantly predict both the perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of use of SNS [23]. Subjective norms have been found to be critical drivers in predicting citizens' intentions to engage in e-participation [24]. In short, subjective norms create social pressure to comply with specific standards. Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

*H2: Subjective norms influence youth intentions to use social media for political participation.*

According to the TRA, an individual's attitude is shaped by their cognitive assessment of the probability that a specific behaviour will result in a particular outcome, modified by their appraisal of the outcome's desirability [25]. Attitudes have been shown to influence people's intention to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine [26], and that they influence intentions to use social media, for example, during sporting events [27]. The intention to vote has also been found to be more strongly influenced by individual attitudes towards candidates and their political parties' subjective norms [28]. Carrying these expectations forward to youth social media use, it is hypothesised that:

*H3: Attitudes influence youth intentions to use social media for political participation.*

The TRA model has been leveraged to explain a range of behaviours, and its flexibility grants the model abundant significant power. However, it is rather context-agnostic and, in this sense, requires further elucidation for the context within which it is applied. Below, hypotheses are put forward that leverage explanatory variables from the CVM to refine the TRA model and situate it within the specific context of political participation on SNS.

### 2-2- Civic Voluntarism Model Components

Psychological engagement is the first important dimension of political participation under the CVM. It is theorised to have three major components: interest, efficacy, and involvement. A strong interest in public affairs is expected to encourage political and civic participation on social media [29]. While resources and networks are often found to be stronger predictors of offline political participation [30, 31], psychological engagement can have a greater influence than the other dimensions on youth online political participation [32]. In their work, Koc-Michalska & Lilleker (2017) [33] found that unlike offline participation – which is driven primarily by subjective norms – online political participation tends to be driven more strongly by personal interests and attitudes and that these motivations tend to be reinforced in digital environments [34]. Here, it is hypothesised that political interest operates on the intention to engage in online political participation through its impact on psychological engagement:

*H4a: Political interest is positively associated with young adults' psychological engagement with politics.*

Internal political efficacy refers to an individual's perception that they are able to obtain their goals through participation [19]. Some studies have discovered that political discussion mediates between incidental news exposure and internal political efficacy [35]. Although, the effects of election outcomes on internal efficacy are not clear-cut [36]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4b: Internal political efficacy is positively associated with young adults' psychological engagement with politics.*

Political involvement has many dimensions but is usually related to political parties [37]. Party affiliation refers to a sense of political partisanship that is typically established during the early stages of life and remains consistent throughout the individual's lifetime [38], and is a powerful predictor of various political activities and involvement, such as leader election, ideology, engagement, and interest [39, 40]. Party identification predicts information-seeking and sharing behaviour on social media [41] and can influence political attitudes by sparking negative emotions like anger [42]. Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

*H4c: Political involvement is positively associated with young adults' psychological engagement with politics.*

The combination of hypotheses 4(a-c) is used to estimate the higher-order construct (HOC) of psychological engagement of a young adult with politics. In turn, psychological engagement with politics, defined as an individual's interest and involvement in political matters, will likely shape attitudes toward online political participation by influencing how desirable and worthwhile such participation is perceived [43]. Individuals more psychologically invested in politics may view online platforms as meaningful venues for expressing opinions, discussing political issues, and mobilising for causes. Previous research has established a strong association between political engagement and social media use, where higher levels of engagement are linked to increased political activity online [44, 45]. This relationship could be mediated by how political engagement shapes attitudes, as those who are more politically engaged are more likely to view online participation as an essential and effective means of political expression [46]. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H5: Young adults' psychological engagement with politics is positively associated with attitudes toward online political participation.*

The theoretical model also links online social interactions to young adults' subjective norms about social media use. Social interactions are, perhaps, the most well-studied political participation dimension of the CVM. Most studies focus on social capital, which captures the value emergent from repeated interactions between individuals that can be deployed to secure individual and collective goals. It has been linked to civic engagement [47] and has been found to promote online political and civic participation [37, 48]. Evidence suggests that online and offline social interactions are distinct from each other [49]. On SNS, users can interact with other users across space and time [50], and young adults, in particular, are motivated to engage politically by so-called weak ties formed on SNS [11]. In this regard, online social interactions may be the source of subjective norms, specifically about online political participation. Thus, this study focuses on understanding if political interactions affect young adults' impact on social media use for political participation through their influence on subjective norms, using the following hypothesis:

*H6: Political interactions influence young adults' subjective norms about online political participation.*

Social media provides an accessible platform for people to engage in politics at a low cost [51] and rapidly. Each political faction's cost structure (money, time, and skills) can become restrictive for specific population segments [52]. In this regard, the literature shows contradictory findings. On the one hand, the empirical works of Gainous et al. (2013) [53] and Schlozman et al. (2010) [54] suggest the persistence of income level as a predictor of online political participation. On the other hand, they found that income is no longer a driver of political involvement. Many offline political behaviours require more time and money compared to the online context [51], and the relationship between digital media use and political participation is durable, having positive and significant effects [55]. Based on that, this study defines resources as the technical affordances to connect to the Internet and, therefore, interact with social media. Hence, the following hypothesis is presented:

*H7: Resources influence youth intentions to use social media for political participation.*

The theoretical model presented in Figure 1 evaluates how attitudes, subjective norms, resources, and social interactions all contribute to youths' online political engagement.
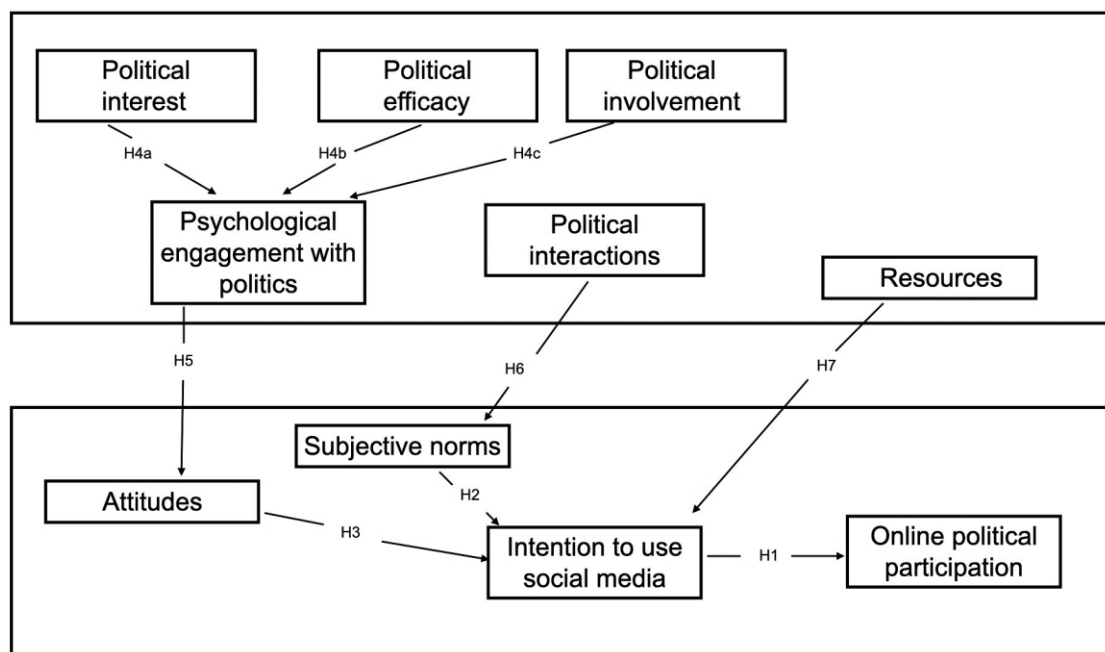


**Figure 1. Conceptual model of youth's online political participation**

## 3- Research Methodology

### 3-1- Data Collection

Survey data were collected from young adults in Portugal from 14 February until 15 March 2022. Generally, surveys are a commonly used tool for investigating online political participation [56], and specifically youth online political participation [11]. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used in this study, and it was composed of Portuguese respondents ranging from 18 to 30 years old. The questionnaire was conducted in Portugal. This survey is composed of nine constructs and 33 indicators. A total of 236 complete responses were obtained. The electronic questionnaire complies with all ethical regulations required at the National and European levels. All participants agreed to participate in the questionnaire voluntarily, and the participants in the electronic questionnaire gave informed consent. The demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Profile of respondents**

| Age | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 18/19 | 27 | 11.44% |
| 20/21 | 42 | 17.80% |
| 22/23 | 86 | 36.44% |
| 24/25 | 45 | 19.07% |
| 26/27 | 15 | 6.36% |
| 28/29 | 16 | 6.78% |
| 30 | 5 | 2.12% |
| **Gender** | | |
| Female | 123 | 52.12% |
| Male | 111 | 47.03% |
| Prefer not to say | 2 | 0.85% |

The questionnaire (see Appendix I) is adapted from previously validated scales obtained from the literature. More specifically, questions for the CVM constructs (resources, political interest, political efficacy, political involvement, and like-minded and cross-cutting political interactions) [37, 57–59] and questions for the constructs of the TRA (attitude, subjective norms, intention to use social media, and social media-based political activities) [37, 60–62]. The interval scale ranging from 1 to 7 was used for all the questions, where 1 = totally disagree, and 7 = totally agree.

### 3-2- Analytical Approach

The partial least square (PLS) structural equation modelling (SEM) technique is used to assess the theoretical model with the data collected by combining the analysis of principal components with ordinary least squares regressions [63]. PLS-SEM is helpful for estimating complicated structural models that incorporate numerous features and measurement items and lack normality of data, as well as validating a research model from a prediction standpoint [64]. The model is a reflective-formative type [65–67]. The CVM is evaluated as a Higher-order construct (HOC) [65], offering a structure for scholars to formulate a construct on a more abstract plane, along with its more concrete subdimensions, also known as lower-order components.

## 4- Results and Discussion

### 4-1- Testing the Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity

Construct reliability, validity, and discriminant validity are used to examine the quality of the measurement model. The minimum recommended composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha (CR) for SEM-PLS is 0.7, and all the constructs pass this threshold and satisfy the criteria for the average variance extracted (AVE) values of 0.50 or higher [68]. Adopting the Fornell-Lacker criterion, discriminant validity is evaluated to confirm that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from each other. Employing this approach, the AVE's square root is compared to the possible variable correlation between constructs. Table 2 reports the three criteria for the construct reliability and validity (CA, CR, and AVE), and the square root of AVEs across all constructs is greater than the correlation between constructs. Therefore, this criterion is met.

**Table 2. Quality criteria for the measurement model**

| | Construct | CA | CR | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Attitude | 0.88 | 0.92 | 0.80 | **0.89** | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Intention To Use Social Media | 0.78 | 0.87 | 0.71 | 0.64 | **0.84** | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Political Efficacy | 0.79 | 0.88 | 0.71 | 0.59 | 0.53 | **0.84** | | | | | | |
| 4 | Political Interactions | 0.96 | 0.97 | 0.82 | 0.57 | 0.64 | 0.51 | **0.91** | | | | | |
| 5 | Political Interest | 0.89 | 0.92 | 0.76 | 0.55 | 0.61 | 0.79 | 0.54 | **0.87** | | | | |
| 6 | Political Involvement | 0.91 | 0.95 | 0.85 | 0.60 | 0.59 | 0.67 | 0.49 | 0.61 | **0.92** | | | |
| 7 | Resources | 0.58 | 0.82 | 0.70 | 0.37 | 0.32 | 0.45 | 0.38 | 0.39 | 0.45 | **0.84** | | |
| 8 | Social Media Use | 0.89 | 0.92 | 0.69 | 0.62 | 0.78 | 0.67 | 0.62 | 0.71 | 0.69 | 0.42 | **0.83** | |
| 9 | Subjective norms | 0.90 | 0.93 | 0.77 | 0.66 | 0.47 | 0.48 | 0.52 | 0.44 | 0.53 | 0.32 | 0.53 | **0.88** |

Discriminant validity is also validated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) analysis to assess the degree of similarity between constructs by comparing their correlations. Table 3 presents the results of the HTMT analysis, confirming that the constructs in the study are distinct from one another, with all values falling below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating adequate discriminant validity. Only in the case of Political efficacy and Political interest is the HTMT value 0.94, which is still a valid threshold as suggested by Sarstedt et al. (2023): "A threshold of 0.90 or even closer to 1 should be used" when the constructs are conceptually similar [69]. In summary, the HTMT results confirm the discriminant validity of the model [64].

Kim et al. (2020) [70] show that social media use can enhance political efficacy by providing users with political knowledge and a sense of community, leading to increased political participation. Chan & Guo (2013) [71] show that political participation encompasses a range of activities, from voting to engaging in political discussions and activism. Social media platforms facilitate both online and offline political participation by providing a space for political expression and mobilisation. The relationship between social media use and political participation is moderated by political efficacy. For instance, Facebook use predicts political and civic participation, especially for those with lower levels of political efficacy.

**Table 3.** HTMT results for discriminant validity

| | Construct | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Attitude | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Intention To Use Social Media | 0.73 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Political Efficacy | 0.69 | 0.64 | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Political Interactions | 0.61 | 0.72 | 0.58 | | | | | | |
| 5 | Political Interest | 0.60 | 0.72 | 0.94 | 0.58 | | | | | |
| 6 | Political Involvement | 0.65 | 0.65 | 0.77 | 0.52 | 0.67 | | | | |
| 7 | Resources | 0.50 | 0.44 | 0.67 | 0.50 | 0.55 | 0.61 | | | |
| 8 | Social Media Use | 0.68 | 0.90 | 0.80 | 0.66 | 0.80 | 0.76 | 0.56 | | |
| 9 | Subjective norms | 0.74 | 0.55 | 0.57 | 0.55 | 0.49 | 0.58 | 0.44 | 0.58 | |

Finally, to check for common method bias (CMB), the Marker Variable (MV) is used [72]. The MV included in this study was "Listening to classical music increases my productivity at work", assessed as with most variables on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). By comparing the path coefficient and the coefficient of determination ($R^2$) with and without the marker variable, it is concluded that the CMB is not an issue in this study.

## 4-2- Testing the Structural Model

Following Sarstedt et al. (2019) [67], several criteria to evaluate the structural model are applied, utilising bootstrapping to assess the significance and stability of the estimates. First, collinearity between constructs is examined to ensure that multicollinearity does not distort the results, using the variance inflation factor (VIF) as an indicator. Second, the significance and relevance of the path coefficients are assessed by applying bootstrapping, which involves generating a large number of subsamples to create confidence intervals and p-values for the path estimates. This process helps determine whether the relationships between constructs are statistically significant. Finally, the coefficient of determination ($R^2$) indicates the model's predictive power by measuring the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. Bootstrapping provides robust estimates for these criteria, enhancing the reliability of the structural model evaluation.

The multicollinearity, statistical significance, and the direction of the weights are examined to evaluate formative constructs. Political engagement is conceptualised as a higher-order construct with a reflective-formative structure. All constructs are within the expected threshold (VIF < 5), thus indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Using SmartPLS software, the bootstrapping technique is applied with 5,000 subsamples [73] to determine the path coefficients' degree of significance. The results show that the hypotheses are accepted at a 5% significance level except for H2 and H7. See Table 4 for the assessment of path coefficients and validation of hypotheses.

**Table 4. Path Coefficients**

| | Hypotheses | Estimate | p-values | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Intention to use Social Media → Social Media use | 0.776 | 0.000 | S |
| H2 | Subjective norms → Intention to use Social Media | 0.080 | 0.379 | R |
| H3 | Attitude → Intention to use Social Media | 0.558 | 0.000 | S |
| H4a | Political interest → Political engagement | 0.444 | 0.000 | S |
| H4b | Political efficacy → Political engagement | 0.314 | 0.000 | S |
| H4c | Political involvement → Political engagement | 0.364 | 0.000 | S |
| H5 | P. Engagement with politics → Attitude | 0.645 | 0.000 | S |
| H6 | Political Interactions → Subjective norms | 0.522 | 0.000 | S |
| H7 | Resources → Intention to use Social Media | 0.085 | 0.189 | R |

Note: S = Supported, R = Rejected.

The $R^2$ was assessed for the political social media use and behavioural intentions variable, as it is composed of second-order constructs. As a result, the variance in social media use for political participation is explained by $R^2 = 0.601$ and the intention to use social media by $R^2 = 0.422$. An overview of the structural model and the results is in Figure 2 (Structural Model with path coefficients and $R^2$).
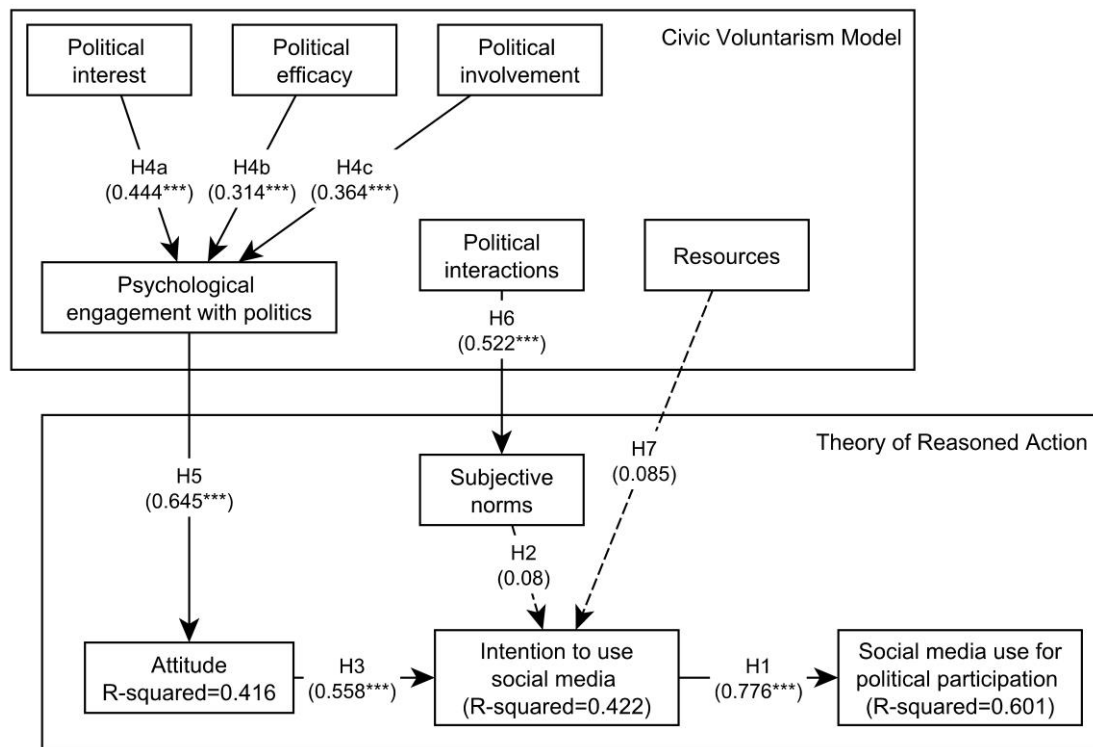


**Figure 2. Final Model Results (Note: *** p-value < 0.001; Not significant paths in dashed lines)**

In answer to the question, "What factors predict youth social media use for political participation?" the results suggest that attitudes (H3) positively contribute to a young person's choice to engage in online political participation. The attitudes construct is constituted of variables that express how an individual feels when participating in politics, how they see political participation as beneficial to themselves, and their general positive perception of political participation. It is argued that attitudes are shaped by psychological engagement, and the current study divided this construct into three subsections: political involvement, interest, and efficacy. Using an HOC to aggregate all this information proves that all the lower-order constructs (LOC) are statistically significant, validating hypotheses H4a, H4b, and H4c. These results provide evidence of the significance of the psychological engagement with politics on youth online political participation (H5). As we can see in Table 4, our study supports Hypothesis H4c, indicating that political involvement is positively associated with young adults' psychological engagement with politics (estimate = 0.364, p < 0.001). This finding aligns with Zhuravskaya et al. (2020) [46], who highlight that the Internet and social media have transformed political engagement by lowering barriers to entry and facilitating user-generated content, thereby enhancing political involvement among youth, and the findings of Kitanova (2020) [43], who found the same across European Union

countries. As mentioned before, a meta-analysis by Boulianne & Theocharis (2018) [11] also showed that those more politically involved (engaged) tend to use online tools more actively (H5).

Political interactions influence young adults' subjective norms about online political participation (H6) with an estimate of 0.522 and p < 0.001. This seems to yield a strong influence over subjective norms, as predicted in H6 and lines up with previous findings that like-minded exposure increases willingness to participate in online political discussions [74]. Kim & Chen (2016) [51] also found that exposure to political perspectives on social media mediates online political participation and highlights how like-minded exposure via blogs and cross-cutting exposure via SNSs encourage engagement, reinforcing that digital political interactions shape participatory norms among young adults.

However, little evidence was found of the importance of subjective norms (H2) on the decision to use social media. Similarly, resources (H7) do not seem to factor in young adults' decision to engage in online political participation (Estimate = 0.085, p = 0.189, rejected). A possible explanation for the latter result is that as the sample comprised only young adults, their access to the Internet and social media to interact in online political participation might be similar. This result aligns with Gainous et al. (2013) [53], who found that while online social networking can facilitate political participation, its effects are uneven across socioeconomic groups. This shows that while resources may play a role in digital political participation, they do not guarantee engagement unless combined with opportunities for meaningful political interactions.

Finally, the intention to use social media seems to be a crucial construct to explain the behaviour of social media use for young adults' political participation. The subjective norms construct is used to understand if the people around an individual (e.g., friends, family, or general people) influence their online political participation. Table 5 presents the indirect effects of the constructs on social media use compared to their impact on the intention construct (to which they are connected).

**Table 5. Total indirect effects**

| Relationship | Total Indirect effect | P-values |
|---|---|---|
| Attitude → Social Media use | 0.432 | 0.000 |
| P. Engagement with politics → Intention to use Social Media | 0.360 | 0.000 |
| P. Engagement with politics → Social Media use | 0.279 | 0.000 |
| Political interactions → Intention to use Social Media | 0.042 | 0.398 |
| Political interactions → Social Media use | 0.032 | 0.400 |
| Resources → Social Media use | 0.066 | 0.194 |
| Subjective norms → Social Media use | 0.062 | 0.380 |

### 4-3- Interpretation of Results

This study sought to determine the factors of online political participation among young adults. The theoretical model agglomerates two models to accomplish that, primarily structured in the TRA and connected to the CVM. Similarly to what is reported by Oni et al. (2017) [75], the findings provide evidence that CVM can be used to study political participation in online environments, illustrating that some CVM predictors (resources and interactions) may be less important for online political participation compared to the political participation in offline environments.

On the CVM, the analysis includes the technological resources, the psychological engagement with politics (namely efficacy, involvement, and political interest), and the interaction with other people with the same or contrary beliefs. The findings align with previous results that reinforce the importance of a person's attitude in the political environment [37], specifically in online political participation [75]. Moreover, the division of Psychological Engagement with Politics into Political Interest, Political Efficacy, and Political Involvement [37] proves effective and is recommended for future researchers.

Several findings are derived from the model assessment. First, no statistical evidence was found of technological resources (i.e., access to technology and technological skills) influencing the intentions to participate online in politics, which distinguishes online political participation from offline political behaviour. Instead, interest, efficacy, and involvement in politics lead young adults to higher rates of online political participation. In short, young adults' attitudes toward online political participation will indeed lead to higher online involvement. Second, the model returns no statistical evidence that friends, family, or people important to the individual affect their intention to participate politically online, suggesting perhaps that the antecedents of subjective norms may be different in the case of SNS engagement. Finally, the results also suggest that the TRA is especially important in understanding young adults' social media political participation, reiterating the timeless importance of the TRA model for the analysis of current online behaviours [37, 75, 76]. Through the TRA, the actions that lead to the intentions to participate politically are rationalised, analysing individuals' attitudes toward political participation and the influence of the people surrounding them.

Younger generations have the lowest levels of political participation in Europe among all age cohorts [77, 78]. The level of political involvement among young adults can serve as a crucial indicator of the effectiveness and renewal potential of a democratic system. As such, these patterns are profoundly alarming for contemporary democratic societies. At the same time, social networking sites have become important spaces for accessing and engaging with political information, offering young people a more direct and personalised form of participation than traditional political channels [79, 80]. Through these platforms, younger generations not only stay informed but also engage in political discussions and activities with reduced barriers to participation. For instance, following politicians on social media has been shown to increase young users' civic engagement and campaign participation, bypassing the need for traditional news outlets as primary sources [81]. This online engagement suggests that while overall participation may appear low, social media is reshaping political participation for youth, creating new pathways that challenge conventional measures of democratic engagement. These new political pathways trigger a loop where offline political participation remains a key driver of online activism, and online activism mobilises offline participation, especially in youths [9]. Thus, offline and online participation form a feedback loop, reinforcing and amplifying each other in modern political engagement [82].

## 5- Conclusion

This study examined the factors driving youth political participation on SNS by integrating the TRA and CVM theories. The findings indicate that psychological engagement—comprising political interest, efficacy, and involvement—powerfully shapes attitudes toward online political participation, which in turn drives engagement. Attitudes emerged as the primary predictor, while subjective norms and resource availability had no significant effect, suggesting that online participation is largely self-motivated. Political interactions influenced subjective norms, but these norms did not significantly impact participation intentions, indicating that social pressures play a limited role in online political engagement. Additionally, technological resources were not a significant factor, likely due to the widespread Internet access among young adults. These insights highlight the importance of fostering political interest and efficacy to encourage online participation, suggesting that initiatives aimed at enhancing political awareness and engagement may be more effective than those relying on social pressure or resource provision.

Rather than treating online political participation as a black box and leaving the respondents to guess, the most important forms of online political participation are delineated, divided by natural characteristics of social media (reacting to posts or tagging people on posts) and activities that could be conducted outside of the online environment (interacting with political figures or searching for news). The present work also moves past the notion that online interactions should be focused only on like-minded ideals [37], expanding to interactions with individuals with clashing political views. This study helps better understand young adults' relationships and ability to express themselves politically online [83]. These main conclusions also help to understand how political institutions can target sensitisation campaigns to promote young adults' political participation. One way to do so would be to create new spaces for political interaction online to promote sessions and free courses on political knowledge (promoting political awareness).

### 5-1- Limitations

Some limitations that open opportunities for future research are acknowledged. The first limitation is the non-differentiation between the types of online political behaviour, which may influence the user's future engagement in political participation [84]. Future studies may examine these nuances. The second limitation concerns the type of devices used for data collection. As the questionnaire was distributed online, there could be bias in the kind of young adults reached for the study. As access to a computer and the Internet is a variable of the model, there is the possibility that the questionnaire only went to young adults with greater access to technological resources. This factor could have led to the non-significance of the model resource's variable. The trends in youth political participation rates seem to vary across Europe [85] (e.g., Scandinavian youth seem to have higher levels of political involvement compared to their counterparts in Mediterranean countries), which may create challenges to generalising the findings across European countries. Finally, the study does not account for the specific social media platforms participants had in mind when responding to the questionnaire. Instead, the questionnaire was designed to be platform-agnostic, making the findings broadly applicable across different social media environments. This approach ensured that respondents were not biased toward associating their political participation with a particular platform but rather reflected their general experience of engaging in political activities online through social media.

## 6- Declarations

### 6-1- Author Contributions

Conceptualization, M.S. and M.N.Z.; methodology, M.S., M.N.Z., and L.A.N.L.; software, M.S. and M.N.Z.; formal analysis, M.S.; investigation, M.S.; data curation, M.S.; writing—original draft preparation, M.S.; writing—review and editing, All authors; visualization, M.S., M.N.Z., and A.A[1].; supervision, M.N.Z.; funding acquisition, M.N.Z., A.A[2]., and M.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

*6-2- Data Availability Statement*

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

*6-3- Funding*

*6-4- Institutional Review Board Statement*

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of the NOVA Information Management School (NOVA IMS) (approval number OTHER2022-1-206190, date of approval January 21st, 2022)".

*6-5- Informed Consent Statement*

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

*6-6- Conflicts of Interest*

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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# Appendix I

## Table A1. Questionnaire

| Theory | Construct | | Item | Loadings | Author |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) | Resources | | I use and know how to use a computer | 0.767 | [37] |
| | | | I have access to the Internet and know how to surf the Internet | 0.900 | |
| | Political Interest | | I check political news and information through the Internet | 0.773 | [37, 86] |
| | | | I engage in a discussion on political issues with friends/people around me. | 0.918 | |
| | | | I prefer to give my views on political issues. | 0.874 | |
| | | | I like to take part in the talk on political issues of my state and country | 0.904 | |
| | Political Efficacy | | I understand the political issues in my country easily and correctly | 0.852 | [58, 87] |
| | | | I am interested in politics going on in my country | 0.792 | |
| | | | I am more informed and knowledgeable about the political situation in my country than people of my age. | 0.878 | |
| | Political Involvement | | I work actively/passively for a political party | 0.913 | [88] |
| | | | I would like to join a political party in the future | 0.925 | |
| | | | I vote for only one political party, always | 0.934 | |
| | Political Interactions | Like-Minded | Agree with my opinion | 0.917 | [57] |
| | | | Are similar to my political views | 0.918 | |
| | | | Support a politician or a political party I also support | 0.913 | |
| | | Cross-cutting | Disagree with my opinion | 0.893 | |
| | | | Are dissimilar to my political views | 0.907 | |
| | | | Support a politician or a political party I oppose | 0.890 | |
| Theory of Reasoned Action | Attitude | | I like to contribute to political participation in social media | 0.922 | [37, 89] |
| | | | I believe backing political participation in social media is beneficial for me | 0.873 | |
| | | | I have an optimistic perception of political participation in social media. | 0.887 | |
| | Subjective Norms | | People who are important to me think that I should politically participate in social media | 0.884 | [61] |
| | | | People who influence my behaviour encourage me to contribute to participating in social media politically | 0.909 | |
| | | | My family suggest I participate in social media politically | 0.835 | |
| | | | My friends suggest I participate in social media politically | 0.879 | |
| | Intention to use social media for political participation | | I am interested in participating politically on social media to support candidates for election soon. | 0.912 | [60] |
| | | | There is a big chance that I will participate politically on social media to support candidates in the next elections | 0.934 | |
| | | | I certainly intend to contribute to political participation in social media to support candidates for the next elections. | 0.641 | |
| | Social media use for political activities | | I have left messages or tagged users in political posts | 0.801 | [62] |
| | | | Posted or shared political issues on SNS | 0.867 | |
| | | | Expressed opinions explicitly on government and politics via SNS | 0.845 | |
| | | | Followed and interacted with official SNS accounts of governmental or political institutions | 0.805 | |
| | | | Used reactions like "like" or "laughing" in publications about politics, economy, social subjects, etc. | 0.839 | |