The Impact of Social Media Use of Political Participation

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Abstract

The dramatic growth of the popularity of social networking sites raised various scholars’ attention. Researchers investigated the impact of social media on politics, especially since the 2008 U.S. Presidential elections marked a historic episode in the political realm, when for the first time, social networking sites allowed users to share their support for a specific candidate or interact with others on political issues. If on one hand, some studies showed that the use of social media has a strong influence on the political field, on the other hand, other researchers failed to find any correlation between the two constructs.

The present study is concerned with the relationship between the use of social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter) and forms of political participation, in an electoral context. This paper relies on a quantitative analysis of the results gathered through an online survey (N=130), examining the extent to which Romanian young people’s use of social media influences their engagement in online and offline participation, during the presidential elections of November 2014. The findings indicate that social media use for the purpose of acquiring news is significantly related with online political participation, but not with offline political participation. However, higher levels of politically-related activities performed on social media, significantly explain both types of political participation. Political knowledge and political efficacy were also proven to have a statistically significant impact on both online and offline forms of participation, in this context.
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Section 1

1. Introduction

In this section, an introduction to the topic of the paper is presented, together with the problem statement of the study. In addition, a brief description of the research methods employed is given, and the structure of the paper, is displayed. The section ends with a set of definitions of the most important terms used throughout the paper.

Social media have become an integral part of public discourse and communication in the contemporary society. The fast development of social media has caused major changes pertaining the way people find groups of individuals with similar interests, the nature of information, the available news sources, or the possibility to require and share ideas (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2012: 1). It has had major effects on fields such as advertising, public relations, communications, and political communication (Husain et al, 2014: 224).

More recently, the prominence of social media has been particularly highlighted in politics, given the fact that the use of social networking sites (Facebook) and microblogging services (Twitter) are believed to have the potential of positively influencing political participation (Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, 2012: 1).
For instance, the 2008 USA presidential elections remained in history for the unprecedented use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube (Paletz et al., 2015: 259). The use of social media within the presidential campaign in 2008 was also continued and even amplified in the 2012 presidential campaign, when both Obama and Romney spent a considerable amount of money on social media (in particular Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Pinterest), with the specific purpose of reaching the young generation. Potential voters extensively engaged in these social media platforms by posting, commenting, video-sharing and even the mainstream media covered the social media war between the two campaigns (Paletz et al., 2015: 276).

Furthermore, social networking sites have been used to mobilise individuals to protest all over the world. Some examples are the London youth demonstrations of 2011, due to the high level of unemployment among young adults, the 2009 Iranian protests against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Carlisle and Patton, 2013: 883), or the Egyptian social movements augmented by Twitter and Facebook, when President Mubarak shut down the Internet for five days (Yang, 2013: 709).

But does this engagement visible on social media platforms have an impact on traditional forms of political participation? Various scholars interested in electoral campaigns, investigated the effects of new media use on political participation. Some researchers discovered that the Internet may encourage political participation (Bucy & Gregson, 2001; Corrado, 1996; Grossman, 1999; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Shah et al., 2005; Whillock, 1997). In addition, some results have shown that the use of social networking sites, in particular, increased traditional offline engagement, such as voting (Bakker and de Vreese, 2011), donations and fundraising (Vitak et al, 2011). Conversely, other researchers have revealed that the use of social networking sites is not at all linked to higher levels of political participation (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010, Davis, 1999; Davis & Owen, 1998; Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Hence, research findings concerning
the effects of social media use on political participation are inconclusive, leaving space for additional exploration of this topic.

When it comes to the young generation, numerous studies suggest that, by traditional measures, they are less engaged in politics (in terms of voting, contributing money, volunteering time, or showing up to a protest meeting) than older citizens (Bauerlein, 2008; Mindich, 2005; Wattenberg, 2007). Despite the fast development of the Internet, little attention has been paid to how young adults use social networking sites to engage in politics (Baumgartner, Morris: 2010: 24). Do they use these social networking platforms to gain knowledge and actually participate in politics? This question raises attention because young people, who are generally not involved in politics, have now the opportunity to be exposed to and to engage in politically-related subjects within their online networks, on which they are generally active (Baumgartner, Morris: 2010: 25).

This study is concerned with the investigation of the relationship between young people’s use of social networking sites and offline and online political participation, during the Romanian presidential elections of November, 2014.

Even though, according to Internet World Stats (www.internetworldstats.com/europa.htm) in Romania, the Internet usage is significantly below the EU average, in the past years the number of Internet users has grown exponentially. If in 2000, only 3.6% of the population had Internet access (www.internetworldstats.com/eu/ro.htm), in 2014 there were more than 11 million users (over 50% of the population) (www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country), many of these individuals being active on social media platforms, as well (www.statista.com/statistics/384457/social-network-penetration-in-romania).

The Romanian presidential elections of November, 2014 were unprecedented, due to the fact that for the first time, social media was used extensively, in the political context of the country, both by the political candidates, but mostly by young (potential) voters. Even the international media discussed the importance of social
networking sites within these elections, stating that a successful social media campaign was led by young Romanian voters (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/romania/11249449/Romanian-presidential-election-does-Klaus-Iohannis-victory-prove-social-media-can-win-an-election.html). Therefore, some thought-provoking questions arise: Did Romanian young people use social networking sites within the elections context? And if so, did the use of social media have any impact on their political participation?

1.1. Problem Statement
The following problem statement represents the foundation of this research:

*To what extent did the use of social media influence young adults' political participation, in the Romanian presidential elections of 2014?*

1.2. Purpose and Methodology
The purpose of this paper is, first of all, to investigate the relationship between social media use and political participation, focusing particularly on young adults’ social media use, during the Romanian presidential elections of 2014, and therefore, to add to and expand on previous findings. Based on the fact that, recently, some scholars discovered a difference in the effect of media use for acquiring news and media use for entertainment purposes (Gil de Zuniga et al. 2012: 321), this paper concentrates on the effects of using social media with the purpose gathering news, on political participation. In addition, due to social media’s interactive nature, the author of this paper argues that it is not only necessary to use these platforms as a source of information (as in traditional forms of media or Web 1.0 media), but beyond that, it is essential to be politically active on these platforms (liking, posting, sharing, etc. political content).

In order to explore this issue, both theoretical and empirical perspectives are employed. The study is based on quantitative research design and the chosen strategy of inquiry is survey research. Based on a literature review of relevant existing studies within (social) media use and political participation, a
questionnaire is designed for collecting data from Romanian young adults aged between 18 and 30 years old.

The purpose of this research strategy is to gain a quantitative description of the target population’s use of social media (Facebook and Twitter) during the 2014 presidential elections and their levels of engagement in political activities.

The data collected from the questionnaire is used in a hierarchical multiple regression, testing the correlation between social media use and political participation, while controlling for socio-demographic factors and known predictors of political participation (such as political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions).
1.3. Structure

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- Structure
- Definitions

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Conclusion
The first section of the paper is the introduction, in which the research area, the overall purpose of the thesis, the problem statement and the structure are described and explained.

The second section begins with a description of the Presidential Elections in Romania, 2014 and an overview of what is known about Millennials’ political attitudes and social media use. Then, the theoretical framework of the research established through reviewing relevant theoretical concepts within political participation and social media. Hypotheses are developed based on the literature review, and summarized in the last part of this section.

The next section outlines the research method and the subsequent research design chosen for collecting the necessary data, in order to test the stated hypotheses, along with a discussion regarding the guidelines for creating the survey, data collection, data analysis and coding.

In the fourth section of the paper, the method of analysis is described, together with each of the measures involved in the study. The assumptions of the chosen statistical analysis are discussed, and afterwards the general results are presented. The section ends with a presentation of results obtained from running the analysis.

The fifth section encompasses a discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical background previously outlined.

Next, limitations of this research are outlined and recommendations for future research are discussed, while reviewing the paper in a critical manner.

Finally a brief, overall conclusion is presented with the aim of answering the problem statement.
1.4. Definitions

1.4.1. Political Terms

Political participation - behaviour that could affect government actions through various activities, either directly by influencing the creation or implementation of policies, or indirectly by influencing the political actors that make those policies. (Yamamato, 2014: 883 in Verba et al., 1995).

Political Knowledge - the series of actual political information stored in the long-term memory (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996).

Political Efficacy - the belief that political and social change is possible and that an individual citizen represents a pivotal part of this change (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954: 187 in Zhang et al., 2010:81); it encompasses two dimensions: internal and external efficacies.

Political Discussions - episodes of conversations with political content that take place between the non-elite members of a political community (Schmitt-Beck, 2008 in Valenzuela et. al 2011: 3).

Generation Y (Millennials) - young people of today (born in the later part of the century), characterized as digital natives (Tapscott, 2009), wired (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003), and technologically-savvy (Huntley, 2006).

1.4.2. Statistical Terms

Hierarchical Multiple Regression – statistical analysis used to evaluate the relationship between a set of independent variables and the dependent variable, controlling for or taking into account the impact of a different set of independent variables on the dependent variable; the independent variables are entered into the analysis in a sequence of blocks, or groups that may contain one or more variables.

$R^2$ shows how much of the variability in the outcome is accounted for by the predictors in the model.
ΔR² - shows how much of the variance is additionally explained by the new predictors, after controlling for other variables.

β coefficients - estimates resulting from an analysis carried out on independent variables that have been standardized so that their variances are 1.

b coefficients – indicate the average change in the dependent variable, associated with a 1 unit change in the dependent variable, statistically controlling for the other independent variables.

p – significance level (p<0.05*, p<0.001**)

Cronbach’s α – test measuring internal consistency within indices

Mahalanobis’ distance – basic method of identifying outliers
Section 2

2. Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the current research and theoretical concepts within the field of media use and political participation. First, a brief description the Romanian presidential election of 2014 is given, followed by a discussion about the social media use in the political field. In addition, the characteristics of millennials (Generation Y) are portrayed in relation to their political behaviour. Moreover, factors that influence political participation are discussed as well. In sum, the review of existing literature within the field of political participation represents the foundation for the research paper.

2.1. The presidential elections in Romania 2014

The presidential elections organised in November 2014, in Romania, took place in two rounds. The first round was held on the 4th of November 2014, where Victor Ponta (the prime-minister of the Romania at that moment) won with 40% of the votes, while Klaus Iohannis (a relatively new candidate in the Romanian political arena), his major rival, gathered only 30% of the votes (www.voceatransilvanei.ro/rezultate-alegeri-prezidentiale-2014-turul-1). Based on these results, political specialists forecasted that the general elections will be won
by Victor Ponta with a detached majority. However, the second round of elections, which were held on the 17th of November proved to be surprising, as Klaus Iohannis was elected president with a majority of almost 55%, whereas Victor Ponta obtained 45% of the votes (BEC Results: www.bec2014.ro/rezultate-finale-16-noiembrie).

Speculations have been made trying to understand what caused the dramatic change in results. It has been generally claimed that the extensive use of social media represented a major factor that contributed to these results. In the first round of elections, the Romanians who live abroad lacked a sufficient number of voting stations, fact which resulted in queues and long waiting times for the Romanian citizens from diaspora who intended to express their votes. This incident was amplified on social media, and from that moment Romanian citizens became very active on various social networking platforms, expressing their opinions online (www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/16/romania-klaus-iohannis-president).

As Victor Ponta was the prime-minister of Romania at the time, he was partly blamed by the citizens for the lack of voting stations (www.nytimes.com/2014/11/17/world/europe/favorite-concedes-presidency-in-romania.html?_r=0). From that moment on, overall, the two major candidates were viewed as contrasting characters: Victor Ponta, representative of the Social Democrat Party was considered the supporter of the old (communist) system, while Klaus Iohannis, the representative of the National Liberal Party was seen as the face of change and progress.

The novelty in this case is represented by the fact that social media was used so extensively, both by the candidates, but especially by young Romanian citizens. Hence, it is interesting to investigate whether the high level of engagement in Web 2.0 political activities had an impact on traditional forms of participation (such as voting, working/volunteering for a political candidate, signing a petition, contacting political officials, donating money, etc.)
2.2. Social media and Politics

The use of social media in recent elections, worldwide, has significantly intensified, especially among young adults. Of interest for this particular age group is the rise of social media use for political information, creating user-generated content and expressing political views. As answer to the growing political use of social media, researchers have investigated these media’s effects on political behaviour such as political participation.

Social media can be defined as a collection of internet-based applications that expand the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that permit the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). Social networking sites are the interface between people and social media, and for many the “Internet” is synonymous with social networking sites (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013: 32). One of the most interesting characteristic of social media is represented by the term “user-generated content”, which refers to different forms of media content, publicly available and created by end users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). Therefore, people use social media not only to consume online information, but also to produce unique content themselves (Gil de Zuniga et al, 2014: 613), transforming from content “consumers” to content “producers”.

According to Pew Research Center, Facebook and Twitter are two of the most popular social media platforms (www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2). Facebook is a social networking site founded in 2004, by Marck Zuckerberg, with the purpose of being used by Harvard students. Rapidly, it gained worldwide popularity, and today Facebook represents the most used social networking site, with over 1 billion users worldwide (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 63). Twitter is a microblogging platform that enables users to read and send short text-messages, keeping its service simple, by limiting the length of the updates to 140 characters. Compared to the more private environment provided by Facebook, most messages on Twitter are public and searchable, as the main feature of Twitter is the hashtag, which allows content organization by categorizing information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 67).
In Romania, these social media platforms are also considered to be one of the most popular ones (www.emoderation.com/social-media-fast-facts-central-and-eastern-europe) and this is the reason why they will be in focus throughout this paper.

The era of new media can be looked at, in terms of three evolutionary phases. The first phase started in the beginning of the 1990s and it is characterised by the dominant presence of entertainment media formats and old-fashioned communication technologies in the political arena, which were merely driven by profits. In the second phase, which began in the mid-1990s, technological innovations (the Internet, World Wide Web, and the e-mail) made space for new political platforms. The novelty of these new media was mainly found in the interactivity feature. Lastly, the third phase was marked by the Web 2.0 applications which allowed an even higher level of interactivity: if in the second phase people could comment on articles written online by journalists, in the Web 2.0 era users can generate their own content by using wikis and social networking sites (Medvic, 2011: 148).

The last phase is highly associated with the 2008 US presidential campaign which highlighted these innovations in the field of political communication (Medvic, 2011: 148). During these elections, social networking sites were used by young followers of Obama, to stimulate their friends to vote (Turner-Lee 2010: 20). Due to the fact that a significant increase in voter turnout, compared to 2004, was registered, President Obama’s campaign was universally acknowledged as a prominent innovator in the use of information and communication technologies (Robertson et al., 2010: 11). Hendricks and Denton (2010) stated: “The 2008 campaign was unique in that it became the first national campaign in which traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers were overshadowed by new media technologies and the Internet.”, technologies, which significantly altered the political environment for both candidates and (potential) voters (Al Deen and Hendricks, 2012: 183). After these elections, many political organisations, as well
as candidates, understood the importance of social media and incorporated it into their communication strategies (Robertson et al., 2010: 11).

Through social networking sites, political organisations and candidates have not only the possibility to directly communicate with their publics, but also to interact with them (two-way communication). In turn, through social networking sites, voters are given a platform to share their opinions and to be heard. For instance, Robertson et al. (2010) found that Facebook has a significant effect on young voters’ decisions. Moreover, Banaij & Buckingham (2010) determined that young people used social networking sites with the purpose of finding political information, particularly information that couldn’t be found in the traditional media, fact which proves Robertson et al. (2010)’s argument that citizens use social networking sites in order to gather information about political organizations and candidates, as well as to communicate with them and express their opinion.

_Hypothesis: Social media use for news is positively associated with online political participation._

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Consequently, the Internet and social media in particular, can be regarded as a useful platform to potentially engage in politics, especially for young citizens.

However there are studies which found no connection between internet (and social networking sites use) and political participation, such as the study conducted by Zhang et al. (2010), which concluded that reliance on social networking sites is related to civic participation, but not to political participation.

To sum up, scholars still have contrasting opinions with regards to the impact of the use of Internet and social networking sites on political participation.
2.3. Young Voters

"Imagine a generation of kids who can live comfortably in more than one world, in more than one culture, with more than one language" (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003: 50)

The term “Generation Y” was first coined in the USA and it is used to define the young people of today (born in the later part of the century). Scholars do not agree on a universal characterisation of Generation Y (also referred to as Millennials): if on one hand, optimists claim that the young people of today will change the world for the better, on the other hand, pessimists question the capacity of this generation to become responsible adults (Mihalcea et al., 62). However, there are a few characteristics that shape the Generation Y’s profile: they are digital natives (Tapscott, 2009), wired (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003), and technologically-savvy (Huntley, 2006). They are also criticized for their individualistic approach and egoistic personalities, mainly due to the fact that they believe that other people’s opinions are rarely important (Twenge, 2009: 399).

But what are Millennials’ attitudes towards political participation? According to Bennett (1998), the ideal citizen is informed about issues of public concern, active in community and political groups, and enthusiastic to participate in political actions, such as voting or campaigning (Bennett, 1998; Zukin et al., 2006 in Wells, 2010: 420). However, today’s young generation is considered to be disengaged and apathetic with regards to political participation, being categorized as the least likely to vote (Ward, 2008: 513). In addition, a study on young people’s electoral participation in Europe, conducted by Fieldhouse et al. (2007) also found that young people have lower rates of voting than their elders (798). They have very low levels of political interest and knowledge, they do not trust politicians, and they do not believe they have the power to change anything (Fer, 2015: 2).

The same applies for Romanian young citizens. According to Fer (2015), Romanian young people are disengaged because of lack of information and motivation. Most of the Romanian young people are not interested in joining a
formal political organization (political party), get involved in local politics, or contact political figures (Fer, 2015: 5).

Therefore, it is interesting to consider if the fact that young adults are disinterested in politics could be changed through the use of social networking sites, as they are constantly active on these communication platforms.

However, there are also arguments claiming that young people are not characterised by a “lack of pathos” (Colleman, 2005: 13) concerning main issues and values. Colleman claims that, instead, they show interest in new forms of participation, such as signing petitions or demonstrations, reshaping the political landscape (Colleman, 2005: 14). Furthermore, he states that it is not the young people who are disengaged from formal politics, but the political institutions are disconnected from young people (Colleman, 2005: 4). Bennet (2008) supports Colleman’s (2005) idea that young people are more inclined towards non-traditional forms of political activities. In addition, he reasons that the young generation is disengaged from traditional politics because they do not understand politicians.

2.4. Political participation

The acts representing political participation included in various researches throughout the years have not significantly changed. However, the definition of this concept encountered a development. For instance, Macedo et al. (2005) considered that political participation and civic participation are intertwined concepts, allowing the concept of participation to expand to civic activities. This view is also noted in Norris’ definition which describes participation as “any dimensions of social activity that are either designed directly to influence government agencies and the policy process, or indirectly to impact civil society, or which attempt to alter systematic patterns of social behaviour” (Norris, 2002: 16 in Theocharis, 2014: 4).

The most common view, explains political participation as a set of activities that citizens perform, with the purpose of influencing the government’s structure,
policies, or officials (Conway in Vitak et al, 2011: 108). It refers to behaviour that could affect government actions through various activities, either directly by influencing the creation or implementation of policies, or indirectly by influencing the political actors that make those policies (Yamamato, 2014: 883 in Verba et al., 1995). Citizens can elect political representatives, who make policies that will regulate how much they have to pay in taxes and who are the beneficiaries of social programmes. They can also be part of organisations which aim to directly influence these policies. By engaging in public debate, they can also express their interests, preferences or needs (Paletz et al., 2015: 171).

The most common form of participation is voting - a unique political act which allows the views of the majority of people to be represented (Paletz et al., 2015: 171). However, it is important to acknowledge that political participation goes beyond the actual act of voting and it implicates taking part in different political activities, such as attending a political event, working for a candidate, donating money to a candidate’s campaign, wearing a button/sign in support of a candidate or attempting to convince others how to vote (Kenski and Stroud, 2006: 175). There are referred to as forms of offline political participation.

Recent studies show the importance of differentiating between two types of political participation: offline and online. Online types of political participation are: gathering political information online articles, sending an email to a political candidate, visiting a political candidate’s website, donating money to a candidate or a political party online (Jung et al., 2011: 414).

Nevertheless, only few studies actually employ this distinction in practical research (Gil de Zuniga & Rojas, 2010). Jung et al. (2011) argue that these two constructs should be examined separately, mainly because of the cost required by online and offline political activities. Considering the cost-effective feature of online political forms, people who, generally, would not participate in politics due to cost barriers, may engage in political activities over the Internet by donating money online, sending emails to public officials, etc. (Jung et al., 2011: 414).
Some studies discuss whether digitally networked political acts, such as posting/tweeting a political status update, sharing/retweeting a political update, liking/commenting on a political update, following a candidate on Facebook or Twitter, are a new form of political participation or not. For some scholars, these activities represent creative expressions that have no genuine connection with politics, while for others these activities are online equivalents to offline political acts, and therefore legitimate forms of participation, while for others, these acts are considered a complete distinct form of participation that has no offline equivalent and should be defined and measured accordingly (Theocharis, 2014: 3). Theocharis (2014) argues that digitally networked acts represent a new form of political participation, as some of these acts fulfil the minimum definition of traditional forms of online and offline participation.

Nevertheless, this paper follows a more conservative approach and considers these digitally networked acts as potential factors that might increase political participation (online and offline), and not as standalone forms of participation.

Considering the fact that participation represents a key element in political communication, understanding what facilitates citizens’ political activities has been a major point of interest for researchers. Within communications, the foundation of the theoretical development of political participation is mainly represented by informational media use (Gil de Zuniga, 2002 in Jung et al 2011: 408).

When it comes to traditional media use, findings are consistent with regards to the fact that reading newspapers is positively associated with political participation. McLeod (1999) found that reading newspapers is especially associated with voting and contacting officials (Chang 2007: 367). Eveland and Sheufele (2000) showed that newspaper use is correlated with more types of voting behaviour and a higher degree of political participation, including displaying a campaign button, sign or sticker, attending candidates’ rallies and donating money to candidates or political parties (Chang 2007: 367).
On the other hand, data on the use of television varies. If some researchers (Wilkins 2000, McLeod et al. 1996) found that television use is similar to newspaper use and, therefore, positively associated with political participation, other researchers found a negative or no influence of TV use on political participation (Norris 1996, Viswanath et al. 1990). The influence of other traditional media (e.g. radio, magazines) is less explored.

However, the rise of the Internet has captured researchers’ attention, and a few studies investigate its effects on political participation, with inconclusive results, as mentioned in the introductory section. This paper specifically intends to shed light on the influence of social networking sites use (Facebook and Twitter) on political participation.

It has also been argued that media effects on political participation depend on individuals’ motives for using media. Based on Katz and Gurevitch’s (1974) classification, the reasons why individuals use media are: surveillance, personal identity construction, social relationships and entertainment. Current studies show that using media for surveillance and information acquisition has a positive impact on political participation (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Norris, 2000; Prior, 2007; Shah, 1998; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001; Zhang & Chia, 2006 in Gil de Zuniga et al. 2012: 321). Consequently, it is not necessarily the media itself that can affect individuals’ political participation, but the particular ways in which individuals use media (Gil de Zuniga, 2009 in Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012: 321).

**Hypothesis:** Social media use for news is positively associated with offline political participation.

**Hypothesis:** Social media use for political activities is positively associated with offline political participation.
However, the author of the paper considers that because of the interactive nature of social networking sites, a better predictor of political participation is social media use for political activities.

**Hypothesis:** Social media use for news is positively associated with online political participation.

**Hypothesis:** Social media use for political activities is positively associated with offline political participation.

Hypothesis: Social media use for political activities is a better predictor for offline political participation than social media use for news.

Hypothesis: Social media use for political activities is a better predictor for online political participation than social media use for news.

Other well-known factors that contribute to political participation are socio-demographic factors, political knowledge, political participation and political discussions. Each of these will be discussed in the following sections.

### 2.5. Socio-demographic factors

Studies following a sociological approach tried to understand determinants of political participation through structural-objective variables. The results showed that socioeconomic status (economic and sociological measure based on income, education and occupation) is the most important predictor of political participation: a higher socioeconomic status leads to a higher level of political participation (Cohen, Vigoda & Samorly, 2001; McLeod et al., 1996; Nowak, Rickson, Ramsey & Goudy, 1982 in Jung et al., 2011: 410).

In addition, findings showed that gender and age are significant factors in political variables. Gender differences in political participation have been persistent over time and across different countries (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996 in Jung at el., 2011: 410). Consistent findings show that men tend to be more active in political affairs, while women are equally, or more active, in community activities, and

Literature has also revealed a positive link between age and political participation (Han, 2008; Kaid, McKinney & Tedesco, 2007; McLeod et al. 1996 in Jung et al.:2011: 410), “as people become increasingly engaged over time” (Gerodimos, 2010: 22).

2.6. Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is considered one of the most influential variables in political science, playing a crucial role in the decision-making process by facilitating the connection of fundamental political values to policy and candidate alternatives (Goren, 2012; Zaller, 1992 in Robison, 2015: 1). The widely accepted definition of political knowledge was coined by Delli Carpini and Keeter who conceptualized it as the series of actual political information stored in the long-term memory (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). According to Niemi and Junn (1998), knowledge is an essential factor aiding to successful political engagement and citizens should have at least a basic understanding of the political system in which they express preferences and designate political representatives (Niemi and Junn 1998, 1 in Soule, 2011: 2).

It is claimed that political knowledge has a key contribution in political behaviour and decision-making, because the more knowledgeable a citizen is, the more politically active he/she is (Zukin, Andolina, Keeter, Jenkins, Delli Caprini, 2006 in Robison, 2015: 1). For instance, Delli Carpini & Keeter (1996) found a strong effect of political knowledge on the probability of voting. Popkin & Dimok support these findings, as they also found that political knowledge is an influential element affecting the decision to vote. As their study concerned American voters, they concluded that the non-voting trend in America is not related to lack of trust in government, lack of interest in politics or feelings of inefficacy; but the major reason to why Americans do not vote is lack of knowledge (Popkin & Dimock, 1999:142 in Soule 2001: 3) As a result, voters cannot properly monitor politicians,
and political participation becomes mainly cost with little benefit, without a sufficient level of political knowledge, resulting in decreased political participation (Leeson, 2008: 162).

Individuals who are very informed in one area of politics tend to be informed across other areas of politics as well (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Political participation requires some material and cognitive resources, and chief among these is information. Individuals who possess sufficient political knowledge are better able to understand their own interests and how to effectively participate in the political process. People who have higher levels of political information tend to be more politically efficacious, as well, and have the confidence and ability to participate in the marketplace of political ideas (Galston, 2004; DelliCarpini and Keeter, 1996; McDevitt and Chaffee, 2000; Meirick and Wackman, 2004).

Many scholars found a strong positive relationship between the education level and political knowledge. However, what is worth noting is the fact that regardless of rising levels of education, the level of political knowledge remained constant; it is similar to what it was sixty years ago. In addition, despite the tremendous progress of women and black people, their political knowledge also remained at similar levels (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 162-163 in Soule, 2001: 2).

When considering young adults, it has been found that they are even less knowledgeable than older generations (159). Kaid et al. (2007) discovered that young people are not politically engaged due to lack of political knowledge. A perceived level of knowledge influences political participation not only directly, but also indirectly through political efficacy. In this sense, Semetko and Valkenburg (1998) argued that political efficacy should be understood in a context of political learning.

An older study on American youth was conducted on 15-24 year-olds by the National Association of Secretaries of State. The sample studied comprises mainly of Generation Y. In this study, studies showed that Generation Y had an ambiguous understanding of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society
Although the majority of the respondents provided top ratings to “being an American,” online a few could give a clear definition to what that means. “Citizenship is to enjoy the rights that our country has to offer,” responded one person. “Citizenship is freedom of speech, right to vote, right to bear arms, religion, property and privacy…” said another (New Millennium Project 35). Rights, better understood than responsibilities, tend to cluster around vague notions of “helping others” and “being a good person” (35). This cohort has not thought deeply about its’ responsibilities or opportunities as citizens. Understanding political facts builds a setting for both absorption and preservation of new data. The combination of insufficient knowledge and a weaker interest may negatively affect this generation, even in its highest participation times (middle age). (Soule, 2001: 3)

However, Polat (2005) argues that if on one hand a high level of political knowledge may lead to a higher level of political participation, on the other hand politically knowledgeable people might be dissatisfied with the information gathered, and therefore be disengaged. Nevertheless, the last possibility is not empirically sustained, and researchers continue to argue that political knowledge might escalate political participation (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Jung et al., 2011; Yamamoto et al., 2013).

**Hypothesis:** Political knowledge is positively associated with offline political participation.

**Hypothesis:** Political knowledge is positively associated with online political participation.

### 2.7. Political Efficacy

Campbell, Gurin and Miller (1954) were the first to identify efficacy as an influence on voting behaviour, in ‘The Voter Decides’. Based on their definition, political efficacy implies the belief that political and social change is possible and that an individual citizen represents a pivotal part of this change (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954: 187 in Zhang et al., 2010:81), being one of the most important
psychological constructs associated with political participation (Cohen et al., 2001; Delli Carpini, 2004; Gans, 1967; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Current characterizations of political efficacy continue to follow Campbell et al.’s approach, describing this concept as a person’s belief in his/her capacity of understanding politics, being heard, and making a difference politically (Catt, 2005: 1).

Political efficacy encompasses two dimensions: internal and external efficacy. Internal political refers to beliefs of self-competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics (personal sense of efficacy). It is most commonly referred to as an individual’s opinions about the influence he/she may have on the political process as a result of his/her personal skills and confidence, or the skills and confidence of similar individuals. External efficacy refers to beliefs about the responsiveness of political officials to citizens’ demands (a more system-oriented sense of efficacy) (Kensi and Stroud, 2006:174).

Taking into consideration the fact that citizens must first and foremost believe that they are able to influence change before they are capable of understanding the value of engaging in the political process, political efficacy is regarded as a prerequisite of political participation (Abramson and Aldricj, 1982 in Zhang et al: 81). Empirical findings advocate that political efficacy is linked to several forms of political participation, such as political campaigning, contacting political officials and voting (Pollock, 1983). Specifically, those with higher levels of efficacy have a likelihood of voting, with 20-30% higher than those with lower levels of efficacy (Kahne and Westheimer, 2006: 289 in Sharoni, 2012). High levels of efficacy among citizens are usually viewed as desirable for the stability of democracy, because “in the modern democratic society, citizens should feel that they have some power to influence the actions of their government” (Wright, 1981: 69). Citizens who are confident about having this power are more likely to support the democratic system.

The stability of political efficacy has often been questioned and research (sometimes with different measures) has shown different results regarding this
issue. Some scholars argue that external efficacy is more unstable over time, compared to internal efficacy (Acock and Clarke, 1990; Gurin and Brim, 1984). Other scholars posit that both internal and external efficacies remain consistent in time and that they are developed early in life. Simply put, this means that once one has political efficacy, he/she is likely to keep it. Hence, if children’s or youths’ political efficacy can be implemented early on, there is a chance that they will become confident adults, willing to act if needed (Sohl, 2014: 19), This is the reason why acquisition of political efficacy is often seen as crucial for future participation as an active citizen in a democracy.

Bandura (1977) argued that internal efficacy and external efficacy are linked, and later on, Madsen (1987) adapted this theory to the political context. He claims that individuals with low external political efficacy and low external political efficacy do not engage in politics and are apathetic to the political system, while individuals with high external political efficacy and high internal political efficacy engage in conventional forms of participation (such as voting) and support the political system. Citizens with low external political efficacy, but high internal political efficacy are most likely to engage in protest oriented forms of participation and have a sense of grievance. At the other pole, citizens with high external political efficacy and low internal political efficacy have a similar behavior with the ones in the first group: they do not engage in politics and are despondent regarding the political system (Madsen, 1987) (See Appendix 1 for details about the Political Efficacy matrix).

Various studies exploring the political attitudes and the level of engagement of youth show that young people have low levels of internal political efficacy, and that they consider politics uninteresting, complex, and irrelevant (ICR, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004; Moffet and Albowciz, 2003; Russell et al., 2002; White et al, 2000; Branngart and Branngart, 1998). One example is a research held in UK, which found that young people’s levels of political interest was significantly lower compared to people aged 25 and above (Russell et al, 2002: 18-19). An Irish study presents similar results, showing that most Irish young people consider
politics as boring and difficult (ICR, 2006: 34-35). Moreover, an American study found that the reason why 18-24 year olds are disengaged from the electoral process is related to the fact that they present no interest in politics (Moffet and Albowciz, 2013).

External political efficacy is broadly measured by the extent to which a person believes that voting can make a difference. Generally, young people usually do not trust politicians and they do not believe in the ability of their vote to influence the results of an election (Kahne and Westheimer, 2006; ICR, 2006; Clark, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004; Russell et al., 2002; White et al., 2000; NCSR, 2000; Branngart and Branngart, 1998).

When measuring political efficacy some researchers preserved internal and external efficacies as distinct variables. However, in practical research, very often, internal and external political efficacies have been assessed separately, and then, for the purpose of analysis, the two dimensions were combined into a single measure (Campbell et al., 1954; Almond and Verba, 1963; Craig, 1979; Craig and Magriotto, 1982; UK Electoral Commission, 2006).

Hypothesis: Political efficacy is positively associated with offline political participation.

Hypothesis: Political efficacy is positively associated with online political participation.

2.8. Political Discussions

Political discussions are defined as episodes of conversations with political content that take place between the non-elite members of a political community (Schmitt-Beck, 2008 in Valenzuela et al. 2011: 3). Through discussions there are opportunities to learn mobilizing information, reflect on news or public issues, and reach mutual agreements, all of which are key antecedents of participation (Valenzuela et al. 2011: 1). According to Katz (1992) political discussions lead to a stronger desire to participate in political activities, because the act of talking itself
facilitates opinion formation (Zhang et al, 2010: 78). Political discussions constitute a method of promoting political participation, by offering information about how to get involved and by enabling a sense of duty to serve the local community (Verba et al. 1995 in Zhang et al, 2010: 79).

Zuniga & Valenzuela (2010) argue that the larger one’s network, the higher one’s probability to be politically engaged. This is based on the assumption that a larger network involves exposure to people who are typically active and could affect one’s views and opinions. In addition, they claim that besides looking at the time spent online, it is vital to consider how people use the media. Gathering relevant information via new media channels was found to have a positive relationship with political participation (Shah et al, 2001).

Moreover, social ties were also found to be relevant when considering political discussions in relation with political participation. It is important to differentiate between strong and weak ties. Strong tie discussions are those discussions among family and close friends, which are characterized by intimacy, trust, respect, access and mutual regard (Kenny, 1994 in Zinuga & Valenzuela, 2010: 405). These characteristics cannot be found when discussing with acquaintances, friends of friends or strangers. In this case individuals are more likely to be exposed to views which are very different from their own and as a result, weak ties discussions are considered to be more positively related to participation (Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2011: 404).

Granovetter (1973) suggests that engagement in weak ties discussions provides information and resources that individuals do not find in their close environment of relatives and friends. The strength of weak ties lies in the provision of miscellaneous information that stimulates learning and offers new opportunities for mobilization (Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Wellman, 1997 in Gil de Zuniga and Valenzuela, 2011: 404).

The importance of political talk within networks and its influence on political engagement has been found with Internet use (Cho et al 2009, Shah et al 2007) and the literature claims that specific motives and forms of Internet use lead to increased interpersonal communication about political issues (Sotirovic and
McLeod, 2011) which in turn increase political participation (Kwak et al 2005). These effects are relevant nowadays, considering the emerging social media which heavily rely on interactive information-sharing, user-generated content, user-centred design and collaboration. Through social media, citizens have the ability to rebroadcast content (e.g. news) and add comments, increasing the capacity for discussion, engagement and promotion of two-way communication (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman & Robinson, 2001; Katz and Rice, 2002).

Subsequently, political discussions are expected to have an influence on online and offline participation (Valenzuela et al., 2011: 1)

**Hypothesis:** Political discussion is positively associated with offline political participation.

**Hypothesis:** Political discussion is positively associated with online political participation.

### 2.9. The O-S-R-O-R model

In the very beginning media effects were studied based on an elementary “Stimulus-Response” (S-R) framework. After researchers began to acknowledge the need for a movement towards a more complex model, Markus and Zajonc (1985) developed the O-S-O-R model which incorporates pre-existing orientations (O1) and personal-psychological factors (O2), in conditioning media use (S) and ultimate effects of media use (R) (Jung et al., 2011: 409). This general O-S-O-R model provides the basics for communication mediation (Cho et al. 2009: 70).

A more recent study (O-S-R-O-R model) by Cho et al. (2009), argues that there is a need to introduce a new element at the core of this model, between stimuli (S) and the outcome orientations (O2): “Reasoning” (R). This element refers to mental elaboration and collective consideration of a topic (Cho et al. 2009: 70). Overall, the new O-S-R-O-R model suggests that the reasoning process represents a crucial condition for news media use to produce political outcomes. It also emphasizes the fact that political discussion is a reasoning behaviour (Southwell
and Yzer 2007), because exchanging beliefs naturally involves mental elaboration (Cho et al., 2009: 74).

This model considers that socio-demographic factors, political knowledge, political efficacy, political discussions and media use have both direct and indirect effects on different types of political participation. However, this paper is concerned with investigating only the direct effects of these factors on online and offline political participation.

**Hypothesis:** Political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions are positively associated with offline political participation.

**Hypothesis:** Political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions are positively associated with online political participation.

### 2.10. Summary of hypotheses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H1:</td>
<td>Political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions are positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H1a:</td>
<td>Political knowledge is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H1b:</td>
<td>Political efficacy is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H1c:</td>
<td>Political discussion is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H2:</td>
<td>Social media use for news is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H3:</td>
<td>Social media use for political activities is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H4:</td>
<td>Political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions are positively associated with online political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H4a:</td>
<td>Political knowledge is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H4b:</td>
<td>Political efficacy is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H4c:</td>
<td>Political discussion is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H5:</td>
<td>Social media use for news is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H6:</td>
<td>Social media use for political activities is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H7:</td>
<td>Social media use for political activities is a better predictor for offline political participation than social media use for news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis H8:</td>
<td>Social media use for political activities is a better predictor for online political participation than social media use for news.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 3

3. Research Design

This section encapsulates the base on which the research is conducted and discusses the overall components of the research design and methods. First, epistemological and ontological considerations are described, in order to give a better understanding of the researcher’s worldview and methodological approach. Then, the quantitative research approach is presented together with the chosen strategy of inquiry. Lastly, the tool used for creating the survey is presented, along with the guidelines used to develop the questions.

3.1. Approach

Researchers distinguish between two major types approaches that drive the logic of a study: deductive and inductive theories. This research follows a deductive approach, which is regarded as the most used view of the nature of the relationship between theory and social research (Bryman, 2011: 11). This implies that hypotheses are deduced based on what is known about political participation and on theoretical considerations in relation to this domain. Within the hypotheses, there are concepts that must be translated into researchable entities (Bryman, 2011: 11) (See Appendix 2 for details about the process of deduction).
Each researchable entity is explained in section 4.2 and it is measured based on the work of other researchers, so that the hypotheses can be tested and then confirmed or rejected. After that, it is important to employ a movement in the opposite direction of the deductive process and use an inductive approach in order to correlate the implications of the findings with the theoretical foundation of the paper (Bryman, 2011: 11)

3.2. Epistemologies and Ontologies
An epistemological issue refers to what should be regarded as acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Bryman, 2011: 15). The epistemological foundation of this research is represented by the postpositivist worldview, in which there is a need to identify and assess the causes that determine effects or outcomes. Creating numeric measures of observations and investigating the behaviour of individuals is crucial for postpositivists (Bryman, 2011: 15), and that is why the researcher favours working with “an observable social reality”, developing hypotheses based on existing theory (research methods, 113). Another important characteristic of the postpositivist view is that the researcher neither affects nor is affected by the subject of research. However, some may argue that it is impossible to adopt a complete value-free position, because the choices of research objectives, methods of data collection and even the decision to adopt a value-free perspective itself can imply the existence of value position, to some extent (Gil and Johnson, 2010: 114). Moreover, it is often claimed that the researcher uses a highly structured methodology, with the purpose of enabling replication and the focus is on quantifiable observations (Gill and Johnson, 2010: 114).

Ontological issues refer to whether social entities should be considered objective entities with an external reality, or whether they should be considered social constructions created based on the actions and perceptions of social actors. These positions are categorised as objectivism and constructionism, respectively (Bryman, 2011: 20). This study is based on the objectivist position, which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors (Bryman, 2011: 21).
3.3. The quantitative research approach

Research strategies are mainly categorised as quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods methods. In agreement with the epistemological and ontological perspectives portrayed above, this research is conducted based on a quantitative approach. Creswell (2009) defines quantitative research as a way of testing objective theories by scrutinizing the relationship among variables (4). These variables can be measured, in order to statistically analyse numbered data. Researchers who use the quantitative approach test theories deductively, based on assumptions, control for other explanations, and are capable of generalising and replicating the findings (Creswell, 2009: 4). As this research paper takes its point of departure in deductive theory and the purpose is to test the hypotheses developed from the literature review, collecting and analysing data quantitatively is a prerequisite.

Besides selecting a qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods approach, it is important to decide on a type of study within these three choices. Strategies of inquiry are types of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods designs that give a specific direction for the research (Cresswell, 2009: 11).

Two of the most common strategies of inquiry associated with quantitative research design are represented by survey research and experimental research. In survey research, a sample of the population is studied, in order to provide a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of that population (Cresswell, 2009: 12). It includes cross-sectional or longitudinal studies, using questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection, with the aim of generalizing from a sample to a population (Creswell, 2009: 12).

In experimental design, the purpose is to assess if a specific treatment influences an outcome, by providing a specific treatment to one group and withholding it from another. Then, the researcher determines how both groups scored on an outcome (Creswell, 2009: 12).
The strategy of inquiry for this study is represented by survey research (non-experimental design), based on a cross-sectional study, as data is collected at a specific point in time, and it uses questionnaire (online survey), as a method for data collection (Creswell, 2009: 146).

There are several advantages of using a survey method. First of all, the questionnaire is simple to administer. Secondly, the collected data are consistent due to the limited response choices. Moreover, the fixed-response alternative questions (that require the respondent to select from a predetermined set of responses) minimises the variability in the results (compared to differences that might occur in interviews). Lastly, it is relatively simple to code and analyse the general results (Malhotra et al. 2012: 328).

On the other hand, the survey method poses several disadvantages as well. Firstly, participants might be unable or unwilling to give the required information. For example, they may not be consciously aware of the factors in question (e.g. not being consciously aware of their motives for a particular choice). The unwillingness to respond makes reference to sensitive or personal questions in particular, that might make the participants uncomfortable. Next, the fixed-response alternative questions may lead to a decreased validity for specific types of data, such as sentiments or beliefs, which might be better understood through qualitative methods. Lastly, the language and the logic of the questions must be meaningful and valid to potential participants, and therefore, great consideration must be given to survey techniques. All things considered, despite the several disadvantages, survey research remains the most used form of collecting primary data (Malhotra, 2012: 328).

3.4. Questionnaire development

The online survey encompasses questions referring to the variables of interest (use of social media for news, use of social media for political activities, political knowledge, political efficacy, discussions, and different forms of political participation). The questionnaire design was created based on the twelve
guidelines proposed by Leedy and Ormrod (2010). First, the questionnaire was as brief (guideline 1) and as simple (guideline 2) as possible (only close-ended questions), so that only the necessary information to the research project was required, and clear instructions on how to answer were provided for the respondents (guideline 3). In addition, the language used was simple, ambiguous terms were avoided (guideline 4), and the purpose of the questionnaire was clearly stated (guideline 5). Moreover, the respondents were given the possibility to choose a “none of the above”/“I don’t know” option, so that unwarranted assumptions were avoided. For example, the question “Please select which of the following social media political activities you engaged in, during the 2014 Presidential elections?” had a “none of the above” answer choice, in order to avoid the assumption that a respondent engaged in social media political activities (guideline 6). The questions were worded so that no clues about potential more desirable responses were given (guideline 7). As it was planned that the data will be computed in the SPSS software, careful consideration was given as to how the answers will be coded into numerical data that can be statistically analysed (guideline 8). Considering that the questionnaire’s length was kept relatively short (average duration of completion 43 minutes), there was no need to check for consistency with “countercheck” questions (guideline 9). A pilot test was run, so that the clarity of the questions could be tested; the questionnaire was initially given to three people who gave feedback on the language, question-construction, and questionnaire length (guideline 10). Lastly, a final analysis of the questionnaire was made, in order to make sure that all questions make sense and that they require the precise piece of information needed for the research; the final instrument was designed in clean lines and appealing design, based on a professional layout and it was made available for different electronic devices (guidelines 11-12) (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 194-197).

The first questions were concerned with socio-demographic variables: gender, age, education, occupation and monthly income level. The next questions referred to respondents’ general use of social media. The next two questions referred to
the frequency of using Facebook and Twitter with the specific purpose of collecting information about news, events or politics. The next questions were concerned with respondents’ frequency of discussing political issues with their friends, family, acquaintances and strangers. The questionnaire continued with questions measuring respondents’ political knowledge and efficacy. Afterwards, respondents were asked to choose the political activities they performed during the 2014 presidential campaign, on the two social media platforms in question. The last questions of the survey were related to respondents’ political participation (offline and online). The total number of respondents was 135, out of which 130 answers were valid (5 respondents were over 30 and therefore excluded from the questionnaire, as they did not fit in the target population). The full survey can be seen in Appendix 5 and more details about the measurement of each variable are discussed in Section 4.2 of this paper.

Considering the fact that an online questionnaire was used, the advantages and disadvantages of this method must be (briefly) discussed.

First of all, an online questionnaire is more cost-effective than a mailed questionnaire. In addition, the implementation of logic jumps was easily adapted, so that respondents were forwarded to other questions (or to the end of the questionnaire), based on their answers. Logic jumps were established for two situations, so that based on a respondent’s answers, a jump to the end of the questionnaire was performed: (1) if a respondent did not fit the age group or (2) if a respondent did not use any of the two social media platforms (Facebook or Twitter). In order to avoid a large amount of missing data, all the questions of the survey were created as mandatory, so that a respondent can submit the questionnaire, only if all the questions were answered.

In addition, there is evidence supporting the fact that online surveys produce similar results to the ones obtained through face-to-face contact (Gosling et al., 2004 in Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 203).
Lastly, as there was an option to create all the questions as mandatory, the data had fewer missing data compared to mailed questionnaires (Bryman, 2011: 668). However, response rates to online questionnaire are usually lower than those for postal surveys (668). In addition, the ethical standards when using an online questionnaire must be as rigorous as they would be if conducting face-to-face surveys or mailed surveys. Keeping this in mind, participants were informed about the general purpose of the study, they were assured that their responses will remain confidential. The use of an online survey implies that participants are limited to people who are comfortable with computers and who have Internet access (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 204). However, as the focus of this study is on young people, it is assumed that using computers and internet access were not issues.

3.5. Pilot test

In order to assess the content validity of the questionnaire a pilot test was run (also in accordance with guideline 10 suggested by Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 196). Content validity represents a systematic, yet subjective method of assessing a scale’s ability to measure what it is supposed to measure (Hair, 2011: 238).

For the pilot test, three participants were asked to complete the survey (face-to-face). Their remarks and comments were noted and the questionnaire was enhanced based on these statements. Appendix 6 offers an overview of the comments gathered from the respondents who participated in the pilot test.

Their overall feedback was constructive, but not many negative comments were registered. Two main points have to be noted. First, one respondent suggested that the online survey should be available for mobile devices use, so that people can access it from anywhere. And secondly, another respondent suggested that the context of survey (the Romanian presidential elections of 2014) is only mentioned in the beginning. However, she proposed that the respondents are constantly reminded of this fact, throughout the survey.
As a result, the survey was made accessible in mobile devices and the questions were slightly restructured, in order to emphasize the electoral focus.

3.6. Sampling of respondents
The survey was specifically intended to Romanian citizens, aged 18-30 years old, who use either Facebook or Twitter (or both). The reason why the lower limit of age is 18 is because it represents the legal minimum age of voting in Romania. The upper age limit was established to 30, as this age group was comfortably accepted as the young generation.

In addition, a snowball sample technique was used. This method is a non-probability sampling technique for gathering research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of other actors (Lewis, Bryman, 2004). Simply put, with this approach to sampling the respondents, the researcher contacts a small group of people relevant for the research project, and then uses these to create contact with others (through referral) (Bryman, 2011: 192). In this case, the author of the paper personally contacted 37 people who respected the criteria of the target population of the research, and afterwards they distributed the questionnaire to their network.

As a fortunate coincidence the 130 respondents were equally men and women, as well as equally aged 18-24 and 25-30 respectively, as shown in the descriptive statistics table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7. Data collection
The survey instrument used for designing this questionnaire is the online tool Typeform.com, in the Pro version, which allowed an unlimited number of questions, and unlimited number of respondents, the possibility to insert logic
jumps, and an interactive visual design. Using this service, the questionnaire was designed quickly, based on a predetermined template. After the designing step was completed, a link was obtained, which was afterwards distributed online. The questionnaire was available on various devices (computers, tables or smartphones), which made it easy for respondents to participate. When the questionnaire was closed, Typeform.com generated results as descriptive statistics, which were downloaded into an Excel spread-sheet (See Appendix 3 for the raw data generated by Typeform.com).

The survey was available for a period of 2 weeks, between 22nd of June and 6th of July.

In terms of distribution, Hewson and Laurent (2008) propose that the main approach to generating an appropriate sample is to post an invitation to answer a questionnaire on relevant newsgroup message boards, to suitable mailing lists, etc. (Bryman, 2011: 664). Accordingly, despite contacting the initial group of people, and requesting them to further distribute the survey to their network, the questionnaire was also posted online via Facebook and Twitter (posted in various groups of interest, as well as sent through private messages), for a fast and widespread reach. In this way, participants could answer the questions with assurance that their identity remained anonymous, and therefore the chance of being truthful increases, compared to conducting face-to-face interviews (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 189).

3.8. Data analysis

The data analysis was achieved using Microsoft Excel and the predictive analytics software SPSS. As the questions were created as mandatory, issues of missing data were not a concern. However, the cases which did not fit the requirements of age (18-30) and social media use (the respondent has an account on Facebook or Twitter) were discarded, resulting in a total of 130 valid answers.

The Excel spread-sheet downloaded from Typeform.com was then numerically coded and imported into SPSS for further analysis.
3.9. Coding

In order to analyse the data collected from the questionnaire, the results were coded.

Starting with demographic variables, males were assigned a score of 1, and women were assigned a score of 2. Respondents aged 18-24 were assigned the values of 1, and respondents aged 25-30 – the value of 2; respondents outside the age-group of interest were not taken into consideration. The education levels were coded as following: Highschool diploma – 1, professional degree – 2, bachelor’s degree – 3 and master’s degree – 4; no “other” options were recorded. The income level was coded as following: “Currently, my parents support me” – 0, <400 EUR – 1, 400-800 EUR – 2, 801-1200 EUR – 3, more than 1200 EUR – 4. Finally, the last socio-demographic variable, occupation, was coded as following: Unemployed – 0, Student – 1, In training (apprentice) – 2, Part-time worker – 3, Full-time worker – 4; no “other” options were recorded.

The Facebook and Twitter uses for gathering news were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale and were coded as such: Never – 1, Rarely – 2, Sometimes – 3, Frequently – 4, and Very Frequently – 5. Political discussions were measured on the same scale and coded, accordingly.

The three questions measuring political efficacy were measured in a similar fashion: Strongly disagree – 1, Disagree – 2, Neutral – 3, Agree – 4, and Strongly Agree – 5.

The correct answers for the questions measuring political knowledge were assigned a score of 1, while the incorrect answers, together with the “I don’t know” option were assigned a null value.

The questions regarding political activities on Facebook and Twitter, online and offline political participation are “check-all” types of questions. Each of the answer options was registered individually and was treated as a dichotomous variable.
(yes/no). The checked answers were given the score 1, and unchecked answers were given the score 0.
Section 4

4. Analysis and Interpretation

In the next section and analysis of the findings from the questionnaire is conducted. First, the method of analysing the data is outlined, along with a description of the variables in the study. Then the assumptions of hierarchical multiple regression and their implications for the study are discussed. Next, the general findings obtained from running frequency descriptions in SPSS are presented. Lastly, the results of the four hierarchical multiple regressions are discussed.

4.1. Method

Regression analyses can be categorized into simple regressions, which seek to predict an outcome variable from a single predictor variable, and multiple regressions, which seek to predict an outcome variable from several predictor variables. The hypotheses of this research are tested through a hierarchical multiple regression (sequential regression), which is a form of multiple regression analysis. This method implies that the independent variables are entered in the equation in the order specified by the researcher, based on theoretical grounds. The variables are entered in blocks (steps), and each independent variable is
assessed, in terms of what it adds to the prediction of the dependent variable, after controlling for previous variables. The ability of the overall model to predict the dependent variable is also evaluated (SPSS survival: 149). As a universal rule, predictors from previous research should be entered in the model first in order of their importance of explaining the outcome variable. After known predictors have been entered, the researcher can add new predictors into the model (Field, 2003: 160).

4.2. Measures

Socio-demographic variables. Respondents were asked to state their gender (male=1; female=2), their age (<18; 18-24; 25-30; >30), their education level, based on the highest diploma achieved (answers ranged from 1 to 5: highschool diploma, professional degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, or other), their occupation (answers ranged from 0 to 5: unemployed, student, in training, part-time worker, full-time worker, other), and their monthly income level (answers ranged from 0 to 4: currently, my parents support me, <400EUR, 400-800EUR, 801-1200 EUR, >1200EUR). The socioeconomic status variable was created by averaging the standardized values of education, occupation and monthly income, as they were measured on different scales.

Social Media use for news.

- **Frequency of Facebook use for news.** Respondents were asked how frequently they use Facebook to get information about events, public issues or politics. Their answers were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “never” (1) to “very frequently” (5).

- **Frequency of Twitter use for news.** Respondents were asked how frequently they use Twitter to get information about events, public issues or politics. Their answers were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “never” (1) to “very frequently” (5).
These items were then added into a single index: social media use for news (Cronbach’s α = .51, M=7.12, SD=2.38). This variable was measured based on the work of Gil de Zuniga et al. (2012).

**Political Discussions**

- **Discussions with friends and family.** This variable was created by asking respondents how frequently they discussed political topics with their friends and family, during the 2014 Presidential electoral campaign. The answers were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “never” (1) to “very frequently” (5).

- **Discussions with acquaintances and strangers.** This variable was created by asking respondents how frequently they discussed political topics with their friends and family, during the 2014 Presidential electoral campaign. The answers were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “never” (1) to “very frequently” (5).

These two items were then added into a single index: political discussions (Cronbach's α=.70, M=7.17, SD=2.15). This variable was measured based on the work of Gil de Zuniga et al. (2012).

**Political Knowledge.** This variable was created by adding the scores of 3 questions regarding political facts, related to the 2014 Presidential campaign: “How many political parties participated in the 2014 Presidential elections?”, “Who was Romania’s Prime Minister during the 2014 Presidential elections?” and What political alliance promoted most prominently the importance of Romania’s admission in Schengen, during the 2014 Presidential campaign?”. For each correct answer, respondents received 1 point, with the number of correct answers summed up to construct the variable of political knowledge (Cronbach’s α=.53, M=1.92, SD=.96).

**Political Efficacy.** Respondents were asked to indicate, on a 5-point Likert-type scale, whether they strongly disagreed (1) or strongly agreed (5) with three
statements (My vote makes a difference in elections, Every vote counts in elections and My political representative cares about my opinion). The three political efficacy items were summed up to form the variable of political efficacy (Cronbach’s α=.89, M=11.47, SD=3.05). This variable was measured based on the work of Zhang et al. (2010).

**Social media use for political activities.** The questionnaire asked respondents whether they performed a series of politically related activities of Facebook or Twitter or not. The options were: “I liked a campaign related Facebook post”, “I liked a political candidate’s Facebook page”, “I posted a campaign related status update on Facebook”, “I posted/shared a link/photo/video on Facebook”, “I commented on a campaign related Facebook post”, “I joined a political group on Facebook”, “I joined a political event on Facebook”, “I favourite a campaign related tweet”, “I followed a political candidate on Twitter”, “I retweeted/quoted a campaign related update”, “I replied to a tweet about the campaign”, “I joined a discussion on Twitter about the campaign”, or none of the above. Each option was recorded in SPSS as an individual dichotomous variable: for each ticked option, the respondent received 1 point (else 0). The items were then added into a single index: social media use for political activities (Cronbach’s α=.91, M=4.67, SD=4.05). This variable was measured based on the available features of FCB and TW and on the work of Vitak et al. (2011).

**Offline Political Participation.** Respondents were asked to select all the activities they engaged in offline, during the presidential elections of 2014, from the following list: “I voted in the 2014 Presidential elections”, “I spoke with public officials in person”, “I called/sent a letter to public officials”, “I participated in demonstrations or protests”, “I attended a political meeting/rally/speech”, “I encouraged someone to vote”, “I wore a campaign sign”, “I donated money to a political candidate or party”, “I signed a petition for a political cause or candidate”, “I worked/volunteered for a political party or candidate”, or none of the above. Each item was recorded in SPSS as an individual dichotomous variable: for each ticked option, the respondent received 1 point (else 0). The items were then
averaged into a single index: offline political participation (criterion variable) (Cronbach's $\alpha=.68$, $M=.24$, $SD=.17$). This variable was measured based on the work of Jung et al. (2011) and Zhang et al. (2010).

**Online Political Participation.** Similarly to offline political participation, respondents were asked to select all the activities they engaged in offline, during the presidential elections of 2014, from the following list: “I sent an email to politicians”, “I visited a campaign/candidate website”, “I donated money to a campaign online”, “I subscribed to a political newsletter”, “I signed up online to volunteer for the activities of political parties”, none of the above. Each item was recorded in SPSS as an individual dichotomous variable: for each ticked option, the respondent received 1 point (else 0). The items were then averaged into a single index: online political participation (criterion variable) (Cronbach's $\alpha=.43$, $M=.23$, $SD=.21$). This variable was measured based on the work of Jung et al. (2011). See Appendix 11 for the “Descriptive statistics” table.

**4.3. Assessment of internal consistency for the computed variables**

Internal reliability applies to multiple-indicator measures, in which each respondent’s answers to each question are aggregated to form an overall score (e.g. political knowledge, political efficacy, etc.). In this case, there is a possibility that there is no internal consistency, meaning that the indicators lack coherence. The most commonly used method to check for internal consistency is to run a scale analysis and interpret the value given by Cronbach’s $\alpha$. The $\alpha$ coefficient varies between 0 (no internal reliability) and 1 (perfect internal reliability). As a rule of thumb, the $\alpha$ value of .70 is considered to be efficient (Bryman, 2011: 159).

The table presented below displays the internal reliability values for each computed variable. Social media use for political activities is the variable computed based on available features of Facebook and Twitter, and the judgement of the author of the paper. This variable has the highest $\alpha$ score (.91), and presents no internal consistency concerns. Most variables meet the .70 $\alpha$ value (e.g.: efficacy, discussions). Some of them, however, have slightly lower $\alpha$,
but as they are very close to the standard value, they are assumed to have internal consistency (socioeconomic status, offline political participation). What is worth noting is that political knowledge and online political participation have quite low scores. However, researchers do not support the strategy of excluding variables from the research because of the low Cronbach’s α, if they are measured based on previous research. When measuring political knowledge, Vitak et al. (2011) also obtained a low Cronbach’s α score (α=.57).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Use for News</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Efficacy</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussions</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Use for Political Activities</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline Political Participation</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Political Participation</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4. Assumptions

#### 4.4.1. Outliers

An outlier is a case with extreme values on one variable or strange combination of scores on two or more variables that distorts statistics. It is a case that differs considerably from the main responses and can cause bias in the model, as it affects the value of the regression coefficients (Field, 2003: 162). A common way to detect outliers is to look at the Mahalanobis’ distance (Survival: 159). In this case, there are 7 independent variables for each of the two regressions, meaning that there are 7 degrees of freedom (df). Considering the significance level p<0.05, the Chi Square table (see Appendix 7), indicates that the maximum value for the Mahalanobis distance is 14.067. In the first regression, 2 cases were found as
outliers (case 17 and 39), in the second regression, 7 outliers were found (cases 4, 17, 39, 106, 110, 120, 122), in the third regression 2 number of outliers were found (cases 17 and 39) and in the last model 7 number of outliers were found (cases 4, 17, 39, 106, 110, 120, 122). However, various scholars suggest that it is difficult to decide whether the outliers should be removed from the model or not, and most suggestions indicate that they should be kept in the analysis, with the warning of interpreting the results with caution. Therefore, in this paper, all outliers will be retained in the main analysis. Nonetheless, a second analysis will be conducted, where the outliers are removed from each model. The results show similar results to the analysis in which the outliers are retained and specific details can be seen in Appendix 8.

4.4.2. Multicollinearity

4.4.2.1. Correlations

In a hierarchical multiple regression, it is important to run a correlation analysis, in order to check that the independent variables are not highly correlated (See Appendix 10). In Table 2, it can be seen that Social media news use and Social media for political activities are correlated ($r=.749$, $p<0.001$). Scholars propose that the correlated variables should be included in two distinct regression models, in order to avoid multicollinearity issues (Eveland and Scheufele, 2000 in Gil de Zuniga et al., 2014: 620).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>SMNU</th>
<th>PK</th>
<th>PE</th>
<th>PD</th>
<th>SMPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>-.110</td>
<td>-.193*</td>
<td>-.071</td>
<td>-.183*</td>
<td>-.233**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td>.246**</td>
<td>.193*</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.176*</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.184*</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMNU</td>
<td>.508**</td>
<td>.560**</td>
<td>.591**</td>
<td>.749**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>.501</td>
<td>.623**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>.402**</td>
<td>.558**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>.571**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: G=gender, A=age, SES=socioeconomic status, SMNU=social media news use, PK=political knowledge, PE=political efficacy, PD=political discussions, SMPA=social media use for political activities, p*<.05, p**<.001

Therefore, four different models will be tested based on hierarchical multiple regression:

- The first model: Step 1 - Demographics, Step 2 - Political Variables, Step 3 - Social Media Use for News; Dependent variable - Offline Political Participation
- The second model: Step 1 - Demographics, Step 2 - Political Variables, Step 3 - Social Media Use for Political Activities; Dependent variable - Offline Political Participation
- The third model: Step 1 - Demographics, Step 2 - Political Variables, Step 3 - Social Media Use for News; Dependent variable - Online Political Participation
- The fourth model: Step 1 - Demographics, Step 2 - Political Variables, Step 3 - Social Media Use for Political Activities; Dependent variable - Online Political Participation

### 4.4.2.2. VIF and Tolerance

Despite checking for high correlations, multicollinearity should also be verified by looking at the variance inflation factor levels (VIF) and tolerance values, which are found in the Coefficients table. The VIF shows if a predictor has a strong linear relationship with the other predictors (Field, 2003:175). There are no bounding rules with regards to what VIF values represent a cause of concern. However, Myers (1990) proposes that VIF values lower than 10 suggest no causes of concern (Field, 2003: 175). Tolerance is an indicator of how much of the variability of the specified independent is not explained by the other independent variables in the model (Survival: 158) and it is VIF’s reciprocal (Tolerance=1/VIF). As such, tolerance values below 0.1 indicate serious multicollinearity issues, although Menard (1995) suggests that values below 0.2 also show potential issues. In all
four regression model, the tolerance levels are higher than .2 and the VIF levels are well below the value of 10, results which indicate that, in this case, multicollinearity is not a concern (See Appendix 9, tables “Coefficients”, columns “Collinearity Statistics”).

4.4.2.3. **Condition Index**
The condition index values also indicate multicollinearity, and it can be found in the collinearity diagnostics table. All four models have a condition index lower than 30, meaning that there is no severe multicollinearity. However, more conservative scholars use a value of 15. Based on this value, some of the models violate the assumption. Nevertheless, the value of 30 will be used and therefore the multicollinearity assumption is met based on correlation values, tolerance levels, VIF levels and condition index values (See Appendix 9, tables “Collinearity Diagnostics”, columns “Condition Index”).

4.4.2.4. **Independent errors**
The assumption of independent errors implied a lack of autocorrelation for the residual terms of any two observations (Field, 2003: 170). It can be checked by looking at the Durbin-Watson test, which tests for serial correlations between errors and can be found in the last column of the model summary table. The test values range between 0 and 4, where 2 means that the residuals are independent. The closest to 2 the value of the test is, the better, and scores lower than 1 or higher than 3 represent signals that this assumption is not met (Field, 2003: 189). For this analysis, the Durbin-Watson test scores are 1.99, 2.21, 1.94 and 2.10 respectively. As all values are considered to be close to 2, it can be stated that the assumption of independent errors has been met (See Appendix 9, tables “Model Summary, columns “Durbin-Watson”).

4.4.2.5. **Linearity, Normal Distribution and Homoscedasticity**
Linearity, normal distribution and homoscedasticity refer to the distribution of scores and the nature of relationship between the variables. They can be checked from the residuals scatterplots, which are generated as part of the multiple
regression procedure. Residuals are the differences between the obtained and the predicted dependent variable scores (SPSS survival: 151). These assumptions can be inspected by looking at three graphs: Normal P-Plot, histogram and scatterplot. For normality, the residuals should be normally distributed about the predicted dependent variables scores; for linearity, the residuals should have a straight-line relationship with predicted dependent variables scores; and for homoscedasticity, the variance of the residuals about predicted dependent variable scores should similar for all predicted scores.

When looking at the normal P-Plot, all four models meet the assumption of linearity, as the cases are grouped in a diagonal, linear shape. The scatterplot shows a certain level of heteroscedasticity for all four models, but the cases appear to be distributed relatively equally above and below 0. The histogram graph shows potential issues with normal distribution, as well (See Appendix 9, Histograms, Normal P-Plots of Regression Standardized Residual and Scatterplots).

4.4.2.6. Sample size

In a multiple regression, it is important to meet the requirement of an appropriate sample size, which is most commonly calculated with a formula proposed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), which takes into consideration the number of independent variables: \( N > 50 + 8m \) (where \( N \) is the number of responses, and \( m \) is the number of independent variables) (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2007: 123). In this case, each regression model includes 7 independent variables, meaning that the minimum number of respondents required is 106. For this research, 135 responses were gathered; however 5 cases included missing data as they were given by respondents outside the target population (aged over 35), which make a final sample size of 130. Even if the detected outliers would be removed from each model, the condition remains satisfied.

Because not all the multiple regression assumptions are perfectly met, it must be stated that the results should be interpreted with caution.
4.5. General Results

The sample size is represented in equal measures by men (50%) and women (50%), aged 18-24 (50%) and 25-30 (50%). The respondents are generally highly educated: almost half of them hold a Master’s degree (48%), followed by 37% who hold a Bachelor’s degree, 8% hold a highschool diploma and 7% - a professional degree. Most of them earn between 400-800 EUR monthly (33%), and between 800-1200 EUR (24%), and are full-time workers (61%).

![Graph showing age distribution and gender distribution.]

![Graph showing educational attainment distribution.]
Looking at the general use of social media, it is clear that the respondents prefer Facebook to Twitter. 43% use Facebook more than 120 min daily, on average, and only 1% do not use Facebook at all, while 28% use Twitter more than 120 min daily, on average, and 40% do not use Twitter at all.
Regarding social media use for news, 47% of the respondents use Facebook to gather news about events, public issues or politics very frequently, and 38% use Twitter for the same purpose. What is interesting is that 38% never use Twitter for news information.

When it comes to strong-ties and weak-ties discussion, 48% of the respondents answered that they held political discussions with friends and family frequently and 30% answered that they held political discussions with acquaintances and strangers very frequently. Only 8% of the people never discussed political topics during the electoral campaign.
The sample population can be considered as political efficacious, as most of the respondents agreed with each of the three questions measuring efficacy. In addition, the respondents have a good level of political knowledge as well, most of them answering two out of the three questions measuring knowledge, correctly. The first question about knowledge was answered incorrectly by 52% of the respondents.
Among the Facebook political activities, during the 2014 presidential elections the most common was liking a political candidate’s Facebook page (62%), followed by liking a campaign-related Facebook post (61%), commenting on a campaign-related Facebook post (50%) and posting/sharing a link/photo/video on Facebook.
(45%). The least popular activities on Facebook were joining a political group or a political event.

Among the political activities performed on Twitter during the 2014 presidential elections, the most common were following a political candidate on Twitter (39%) and joining a discussion on Twitter about the campaign (39%), followed by replying to a tweet about the campaign (36%). However, most of the respondents did not engage in any Twitter political activities (54%).
The most popular offline activities that the respondents performed during the 2014 presidential elections were voting (87%), followed by encouraging someone to vote (64%), participating in demonstration or protests (22%), attending a political meeting (19%), and signing a petition (18%). The least preferred activities were donating money to a candidate/political party (3%), working/volunteering for a candidate/political party or contacting public officials (4%),
The most popular online activities that the respondents performed during the 2014 presidential elections were visiting a campaign/candidate website (54.6%), subscribing to a political newsletter (33.8%) and sending an email to politicians (13.8%), while fewer respondents donated money online (7%) or signed up online to volunteer for the activities of political parties (8%).
4.6. Regression Analysis

When using hierarchical multiple regression, the most important results to look at from the SPSS output are the presented in the model summary table and in the coefficients table.

In the model summary table it is essential to look at the values given by $R^2$, $\Delta R^2$ and $p$ (significance levels). The value of $R^2$ shows how much of the variability in the outcome is accounted for by the predictors in the model (Field, 2003: 187). In a hierarchical regression, it is interesting to look at the $\Delta R^2$, as this value shows how much of the variance is explained by the newly added predictors. If the $p$ values are lower than 0.05 (or 0.001 two-tailed), the model is statistically significant.

In the coefficients table it is essential to look at the standardized coefficients and $p$.

The unstandardized coefficients ($b$-values) indicate the individual contribution of each predictor to the model, meaning that with a 1 unit increase in the independent variable, there is a $b$ unit increase in the dependent variable (Field,
However, the standardized coefficients (β-values) are easier to interpret, because they are not dependent on the units of measurement of the variables (Field, 2013: 193). These values indicate the number of standard deviations that the dependent variable will change as a result of one standard deviation change in the predictor. The β coefficients are measured in standard deviation units, meaning that they are directly comparable, and so, they offer a more appropriate view on the “importance” of a predictor in the model, in association with their corresponding significance values, given by the p-values (Field, 2013: 193).

The following sections interpret the results of each of the four multiple regressions.

4.6.1. The first regression model

The first two hypotheses are concerned with the effect of political variables and social media use for news on offline political participation.

In H1 political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions were hypothesized to be positively associated with offline political participation. In this regression model the variables were entered in the following order: 1st block - socio-demographics (gender, age and socioeconomic status), 2nd block - political variables (political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions), 3rd block - social media use for news; the dependent variable was offline political participation. The hierarchical regression results can be seen in Table 1.

The socio-demographic variables explained 6% of the variance in offline political participation (ΔR²=.064), at a statistically significant level (p=0.040 p<0.05). Among the individual variables, gender (β=-0.179, p=0.041, p<0.05) was a unique predictor. The negative β coefficient of gender shows that men were more active in offline participation than women, results that support previous findings (SOURCE). It was also expected that the older group of respondents (25-30) and the respondents with a higher socioeconomic status will have a higher offline participation score. However, age (β=0.166, p=0.076) and the socioeconomic
status were not unique statistically significant predictors of offline political participation ($\beta=0.039$, $p=0.680$).

The political variables explained an additional 26% ($\Delta R^2 = .269$) of the variance, at a statistically significant level ($p=0.000$, $p<0.05$), supporting hypothesis H1. Knowledge ($\beta=0.407$, $p=0.000$, $p<0.05$) was the strongest predictor among the political variables, followed by efficacy ($\beta=0.173$, $p=0.035$, $p<0.05$). This means that the higher one’s level of political knowledge and the higher one’s level of political efficacy, the higher the engagement in offline political participation, during the 2014 Romanian presidential campaign. These results support previous findings on similar topics, such as Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Jung et al., 2011; Yamamoto et al., 2013 and contrast Polat’s argument (2005), claiming that knowledgeable people might be disengaged from political activities because they might be dissatisfied with the information gathered. In addition the results support Abramson and Aldrich’s argument (1982), that individuals should believe in their ability of influencing change before actively engaging in political activities that lead to change. Therefore hypotheses H1a and H1b were supported.

The variable “political discussions” was not statistically significant ($\beta=0.100$, $p=0.276$). This result is highly unexpected as it was anticipated that the more one discusses political topics (whether online or offline) the higher the possibility to be engaged in offline political activities. Hypothesis H1c was rejected.

After the predictor social media use for news, was entered, the model did not improve at a statistically significant level ($\Delta R^2 = .007$), leading to the conclusion that social media use for news ($\beta=0.125$, $p=0.246$) does not influence offline political participation, and therefore, hypothesis H2 was rejected. These findings are contrasting the results of Gil de Zuniga et al. (2014)’s previous research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Offline Political Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 – Socio-demographics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.179*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6.2. Second regression model

Hypothesis H3 aims to investigate whether social media use for political activities is positively associated with offline political participation. In order to investigate this effect, a second regression was run, where the variables were entered in the same order as in the first regression, but the 3rd block included social media use for political activities, instead of social media use for news; the dependent variable remained offline political participation. The results of the second hierarchical regression can be seen in Table 2 (the first two blocks - demographics and political variables - are identical with the results of the first regression).

Social media use for political activities explained an additional 11% ($\Delta R^2 = .111$) of the variance in offline political participation at a statistically significant level ($\beta = .553$, $p = .000$, $p < .05$). This means that the more Romanian young adults were involved in political activities on Facebook and Twitter, during the 2014 presidential campaign (liking, sharing, commenting, etc.), the more politically participative they were, offline, and therefore hypothesis H3 was supported.

### Table 4. Offline Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 – Sociodemographics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SES</strong></td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>6.4%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step 2 – Political Variables**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.407**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Efficacy</td>
<td>.173*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussions</td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>26.9%**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step 3**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Use for News</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standardized regression coefficients reported. $N=130$ *$p<.05$, $p^{**}<.001$
Gender  
Age  
SES  
$\Delta R^2$  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2 – Political Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Political Knowledge  
| Political Efficacy  
| Political Discussions  
| $\Delta R^2$  

| Step 3  
| Social Media Use for Political Activities  
| $\Delta R^2$  

Note: Standardized regression coefficients reported. $N=130$  
*p<.05,  
**p<.001

When comparing the two predictors of interest in the two models, it is clear that social media use for political activities better explains offline political participation, as it accounts 11.1% of the variance in the dependent variable, compared to social media use for news, which is not a statistically significant predictor.

4.6.3. The third regression model

The next two hypotheses are concerned with the impact of political variables (H4, H4a, H4b, H4c) and social media use for news (H5) on online political participation.

In the third regression, the independent variables were entered in the same order as in the first regression, but the dependent variable was online political participation. The results of the third hierarchical regression can be seen in Table 3.

Socio-demographic variables explained 6% of the variance ($\Delta R^2=.061$) in online political participation, at a statistically significant level ($p=0.047, p<0.05$). Gender ($\beta=-0.192, p=0.028, p<0.05$) is a unique predictor in the model, while age ($\beta=0.178, p=0.059$) and socioeconomic status are, again, not statistically
significant (β=-0.043, p=0.643). Similarly with the first results, and supporting findings from previous research, these outcomes show that men are more politically participative, online, than women.

The political variables explained an additional 39% of the variance (ΔR²=.395) at a statistically significant level. Knowledge (β=0.512, p=0.000, p<0.05) and efficacy (β=0.222, p=0.003, p<0.05) were the two unique predictors among the political variables, while the “political discussions” variable (β=0.084, p=0.308) was not statistically significant, as in the model predicting offline political participation. Therefore, hypotheses H4, H4a and H4b were supported: the higher the levels of knowledge and efficacy, the higher the online participation level. Hypothesis H4c was rejected.

In this model, social media use for news (β=0.415, p=0.000, p<0.05) is statistically significant and it improves the model with 8% (ΔR²=.081). So even though the social media use for news did not impact offline political participation, it had an influence on online participation. Hypothesis H5 was supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.</th>
<th>Online Political Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 – Sociodemographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.192*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>6.1%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 – Political Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>.512**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Efficacy</td>
<td>.222*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussions</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>39.5%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Use for News</td>
<td>.415**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>8.1%**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fourth regression model

In the last regression model, the independent variables were entered in the same order as in the third regression, but the predictor of interest was social media use for political activities. The results can be seen in Table 4 (the first two blocks are identical with the results from the previous model).

The predictor of interest, social media use for political activities, had a major impact on online political participation, explaining an additional 24% (ΔR²=.247) of the variance, at a statistically significant level, after controlling for age, gender and socioeconomic status, and political knowledge, efficacy and discussions (β=0.825, p=0.000, p<0.05). Hypothesis H6 was supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 6. Online Political Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 – Sociodemographics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 – Political Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Use for Political Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standardized regression coefficients reported. N=130 *p<.05, **p<.001

The last two hypotheses concern the strength of the two social media predictors: Social media for political activities is a stronger predictor of offline/online political participation. In order to investigate these hypotheses, the incremental R² is...
analysed. When considering offline political participation, it is clear that social media use for political activities was a stronger predictor, as the variable “social media use for news” was not statistically significant. In the model predicting online political participation, social media use for news explains 8.1% of the variance, while social media use for political activities explains 24.7% of the variance. Therefore, both hypothesis H7 and H8 were supported, concluding that social media use for political activities is a better predictor of both offline and online political participation, than social media use for news.

As written in section 4.4.1 of this paper, this analysis included all the detected outliers, based on Mahalanobis’ distance. For the purpose of understanding the impact of this inclusion, the same four regressions were run again, without incorporating the outliers. The numbers slightly differ because of the different sample sizes, but the main results stay the same. The full analysis without including outliers and a brief interpretation can be seen in Appendix 8.

4.7. Summary of results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a: Political knowledge is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b: Political efficacy is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1c: Political discussion is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Social media use for news is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Social media use for political activities is positively associated with offline political participation.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4a: Political knowledge is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4b: Political efficacy is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4c: Political discussion is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Social media use for news is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6: Social media use for political activities is positively associated with online political participation.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7: Social media use for political activities is a better predictor for offline political participation than social media use for news.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8: Social media use for political activities is a better predictor for online political participation than social media use for news.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 5

5. Discussion and Concluding Remarks
This section aims to discuss the research results in light of existing theoretical findings, as well as to present concluding remarks by answering the main problem statement.

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the relationship between young adults’ social media use and online/offline political participation, during the Romanian presidential elections of November 2014. The study aims to add to the current research on this relatively new topic, as well as to examine whether social media use for political activities accounts for higher levels of the two types of participation more than the variable “social media use for gathering news”.

In order to explore the issue, a quantitative research approach was employed, collecting data using a survey method, and statistically analysing the results using a hierarchical multiple regression.

The general findings showing Romanian young adults’ political knowledge and political efficacy are remarkable, as they contrast previous results and assumptions of the Generation Y. If studies show that Millennials do not have
knowledge in politics and they present low interest in this field, considering it boring, complex and irrelevant (ICR, 2006; Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004; Moffet and Albrowicz, 2003; Russell et al., 2002; White et al, 2000; Branngart and Branngart, 1998), based on the present research, Romanian young adults seem to be positioned at the opposite pole, as most of them answered the questions measuring knowledge correctly, and agreed/strongly agreed with the meaning of the constructs measuring efficacy.

However, the three questions concerned with identifying levels of knowledge might have a potential issue. Considering the fact that the survey was administered online, respondents could have searched the Internet for the correct answer, and therefore, they could have chosen the response based on their findings, and not on their actual knowledge. This situation could have been avoided with the implementation of a timer for these particular questions: the respondents could have had, for example, 30 seconds to choose an answer, and consequently, no time for navigating the Internet for information. Unfortunately, the instrument for creating the survey (www.Typeform.com) did not provide this option.

An explanation for the relatively high level of political efficacy of Romanian young adults could be found in Hais’ (2008) optimistically painted picture of a more engaged young generation, which started to express interest in politics in the recent years (Rankin, 2008: 6).

When looking at the effect of the socio-demographic variables, the results point out that the block consisting of the variables age, gender and socioeconomic status was statistically significant throughout the four regressions, having an impact on both online and offline participation. However, when evaluating the effect of these three socio-demographic variables, individually, only gender proves to be a unique predictor of political participation. Age and socioeconomic status do not have statistically significant effects, which is unexpected, as among socio-demographics, the socioeconomic status, comprising of the combination between income, education and occupation, is considered, in previous studies, to be the
most influential variable (Cohen, Vigoda & Samorly, 2001; McLeod et al.,1996; Nowak, Rickson, Ramsey & Goudy, 1982 in Jung et al., 2011: 410). Age is also known to have a strong impact on participation, as older people tend to be more inclined to participate than younger people (Han, 2008; Kaid, McKinney & Tedesco, 2007; McLeod et al. 1996 in Jung et al.:2011: 410). As the target population of this study is represented by young people, aged 18-30, the difference between younger and older respondents can be made as participants aged 18-24 and 25-30. The effect is close to being significant, and the beta value is positive, showing that the group aged 25-30 is more politically participative; however, the p value = 0.059 and, therefore, it cannot be concluded that age is a unique predictor of participation in this case.

Looking at the block encompassing the political variables (political knowledge, political efficacy and political discussions), a significant impact is seen in all four models. Not only model 2 is significant in all regressions, but the change it brings is quite large: 27% in the offline political participation model and 40% in the online political participation model (See Appendix 9, tables “Model Summary”, R² Change). As the theory discussed in Sections 2.6 and 2.7 recognises these variables to be very influential in political participation, it was expected to see such a robust effect, confirming the results of previous findings, in the given electoral context. Political knowledge and political efficacy proved to be significant unique predictors in both forms of political participation, supporting previous theories, claiming that the higher the levels of political knowledge and efficacy are, the higher the political participation is (See section 2.6 and Section 2.7 of the paper).

However, what is interesting to note is that the variable “political discussions” has no unique significant effect. It was assumed that the more Romanian young people discussed political topics, the more they engaged in forms of political participation, during the presidential elections; however, this hypothesis was rejected as no unique effect of this variable was found in any of the models, contrasting researchers who discovered a significant effect of discussions on participation: Zhang et al. (2010), Zuniga & Valenzuela (2010) Katz (1992).
Social media use for news proved to be a significant predictor of online political participation, explaining 8% of the dependent variable, but having no power in predicting offline political participation, remaining a statistically insignificant predictor in this model. Simply put, this means that the more Romanian citizens read news on Facebook or Twitter, during the presidential elections, the more they engaged in online forms of participation, such as visiting a candidate’s website, signing an online petition or donating money online to a candidate or political party. Nonetheless, this correlation does not stand when offline forms of participation are considered.

When looking at social media use for political activities, this variable is significant in explaining both online (accounts for 25% of the variance) and offline political participation (accounts for 11% of the variance). This means that the more the young adults liked/favourited, shared/retweeted, joined groups, or commented on Facebook or Twitter political updates, the more active they were in traditional online and offline forms of participation.

Comparing the two social media predictors it is clear that social media use for political activities better explains the variance in offline and online political participation than social media use for gathering information.

These findings have implications for the Romanian political realm, as they suggest the fact that engaging young adults in political activities on social networking sites, results in higher levels of traditional forms of participation.

As young adults are considered to be apathetic towards politics, this strategy might be useful in changing their attitudes and obtaining their input and opinions (Ward, 2008: 513). Therefore, political candidates might invest in their social media presence, in future electoral campaigns, in order to appeal to the young audience.
An interesting detail to notice, is the fact the winner of the Romanian presidential campaign of 2014, Klaus Iohannis, is now the European president with most followers on Facebook (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/romania/11249449/Romanian-presidential-election-does-Klaus-Iohannis-victory-prove-social-media-can-win-an-election.html). It is thought-provoking to consider whether his active presence on this social media platform influenced the Romanian citizens’ perceptions, attitudes towards his vision or decision-making process in relation with the choice of vote.

All in all, the findings of this research paper indicate the importance of acknowledging the usefulness of social media in the political realm, as these platforms seem to be ideal for reaching the younger generation’s attention towards politics.
6. Limitations and Further Research

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the limitations of this study. Suggestions and considerations for further research are provided, as well.

There are several limitations to this study that must be considered. First of all the snowball sample technique used to gather respondents is a non-probabilistic method. The issue with this method is related to the fact that it is unlikely that that the results can be generalised to the entire population (Bryman, 2011:192). Researchers suggest that this sample technique is a better fit in qualitative research instead; however, this is not to imply that the snowball sample strategy is irrelevant to quantitative research (193).

Second of all, some of the assumptions required by multiple regressions were not met, which means that results must be interpreted with caution, and this also implies potential issues when generalising from the sample population to the whole population.

Another limitation of this research is related to the fact that the study was conducted a couple of months after the Romanian presidential elections were
held. As respondents were asked, in some of the questions, to state details regarding their behaviour during these elections, the answers might not be 100% accurate, considering the fact that a significant amount of time has passed since November 2014.

Next, this study examined only the direct effects of demographics, political variables (knowledge, efficacy and discussions) and social media use (for news and for political activities). However, as the O-S-R-O-R model, briefly discussed in section 2.9 of this paper, posits that there are indirect effects among these variables as well, further analyses, concentrating on the indirect implications should be considered. For example, researchers suggest that political knowledge influences political efficacy, because by acquiring information, people gain efficacious feelings. In addition, media use might influence political knowledge, which might result in higher engagement in political discussions, which in turn might result in higher levels of political efficacy. Moreover, all the political variables in question might be influenced by the use of social media, as well, and function as mediators between media use and political participation (Cho et al., 2009). Such complex relationships, including the indirect effects of the mentioned variables on online and offline political participation are interesting to investigate. This analysis could be statistically explored, using sequential equation modelling, an advanced method, highly relevant in measuring mediating or moderating effects.

In addition, the measurement of the variables could be done differently, for a more comprehensive understanding. For instance, the political discussions variable was created by summing the weak ties discussions (with acquaintances and strangers) and strong ties variables (with friends and family). These two variables could be used as two distinct predictors with the aim of distinguishing which type of discussions has a stronger effect on participation, as researchers suggest that weak ties discussions explain political participation better than strong ties discussions. The same applies to political efficacy: its two dimensions – internal and external efficacy – could be used as two different predictors with the purpose of identifying which type of efficacy better explains political participation. Another
interesting aspect is related to differentiating between Facebook and Twitter use; in this paper these social media platforms were combined, in order to obtain a holistic view of social media use. However the two dimensions could be kept as distinct variables, in order to investigate which social media platform has a better effect.

The fact that the paper limited the use of social media to Facebook and Twitter is another limitation. There are several other known platforms which are used in the political field, such as Youtube, Pinterest or Instagram. Furthermore, blogs are also known to be influential in this domain as influencers’ opinions are generally trusted by the citizens.

Lastly, this paper combined various forms of political activities such as liking, sharing, or commenting into one variable, which was used as a predictor (independent variable) of political participation. However, there are scholars who propose that these activities should be considered a separate type of participation, together with offline and online participation (Theocharis, 2014: 3). Therefore, a further consideration would be to test the impact of socio-demographic factors, known political variables and use of social media (potentially in terms of general frequency use or reasoning – for news or entertainment purposes) on the new form of participation: networked (Web 2.0) political participation. Nonetheless, the researchers who propose this approach acknowledge the fact that these types of participation fulfil only the minimum requirements stated in the formal definitions of participation.
7. Conclusion

Considering the fact that social media continues to integrate in people’s daily lives and that it is fervently used by young people worldwide, researchers also continue to investigate this topic from various angles, and this particular study aimed to add a step further in this direction.

Overall, the discrepancy in the findings exploring the relationship between social media use and political participation, together with the interesting characteristics of the Romanian presidential elections of 2014, given the unprecedented extensive use of social media in the political realm of the country, represented the motivation of exploring this topic in depth.

The study hypothesized positive relationships between political variables (knowledge, efficacy and discussions) and online/offline forms of participation, as well as positive relationships between social media use for news and political participation, within the Romanian electoral context. As some researchers argue that the reasons why people use media (for news or for entertainment purposes) are very important in explaining political participation, the author of the paper
further proposed, that given social media’s interactive nature, the activity levels related to political issues (social media use for political activities) are even more influential.

As social media remains a relatively new and unexplored field, there is a need for further research on its implications for the political arena.

All things considered, shortly put, the findings of this report show that social media use had a significant impact on Romanian young citizens’ political participation, during the presidential elections of 2014, and despite the paper’s limitations, the results bring a contribution to existing research in political communication.
Section 8

8. Bibliography

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