

# DO DIGITAL SOCIAL NETWORKS FOSTER CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION AMONG MILLENNIALS? KITCHENWARE REVOLUTION AND 15M DEMOCRATIC REGENERATION CASES

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*Abstract:* Nowadays “education for citizenship” is presented as a solution for many of the political, social, and co-existential issues in Western democratic societies in order to tackle dysfunctionalities produced by globalization, populism, migration, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and violence. At the same time, particularly among “millennials” or “digital natives”, lack of civil commitment and apathy toward politics as a whole contrasts with their intensive usage of digital social networks, or social media. By examining in-depth the scientific literature about the potential conceptual correlations between the use of “digital social networks” and civilian participation among “millennials”, this paper explores two widely studied paradigmatic events of democratic regeneration: the “Kitchenware Revolution” in Iceland after the financial collapse on 6 October 2008, and the “15M Movement” in Spain after 15 May 2011. Despite the substantial relevance that digital social networks played in both cases, this paper wonders to what extent digital social networks foster millennials’ civilian participation, when, paradoxically, they seem to be the population target who contests the status quo but who is not actually being represented democratically in the formal political system. The author concludes that digital social networks could initially foster civilian participation, but they should be seen as a new artefact that, itself, does not necessarily lead to a better political representation of millennials. As well, this paper argues against the widespread assumption regarding the correlation between socioeconomic and educational status and Internet usage factors of millennials when it comes to civilian participation, particularly in extreme political mobilisation events such as the Kitchenware Revolution and 15M.

*Keywords:* digital networks, participation, democracy, 15M movement, revolution.

## INTRODUCTION: EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC REGENERATION

In the last 15 years, a trend of international magnitude in the Western world is the vigorous promotion of “education for citizenship” – what could be called the “rise of civics”: a growing awareness of the need to emphasise the social and civic dimensions of life and human relations. Education for citizenship is seen as a horizon of hope for maintaining, con-

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solidating, and regenerating democracy; although in some cases, there is not a deeper meaning of this expression.

Nowadays we trust in education for citizenship as a solution for many of the political, social, and co-existential problems that Western democratic societies face. As a result, there has appeared a need, a longing, for an education for citizenship within a democratic society that will solve – in theory – the difficulties we face due to globalization, populism, migration, ICTs, violence, a lack of civil commitment among young people, and a lack of interest in or respect for community values as a whole (Guibernau 2013). This process has clear consequences in education and in other areas, as well. By observing two critical events in which democracy itself has been questioned in Iceland and in Spain (Harvey 2000; Castells 2012), we can argue that it presents a systemic issue for contemporary societies. As Putnam notes: “In the context of decreasing political party affiliation, declining electoral turnout and waning trust in institutions, the 1990s were marked by a widespread perception of ‘democratic deficit’ and a cynicism regarding the representational model of democracy, which produced a ‘deliberative turn’ in democratic theory” (Putnam 2002: 404).

This democratic deficit highlights the importance of social or interpersonal trust in promoting voluntary civilian participation, particularly at the local level (Arnstein 1969). At the beginning of this paper, we must provide a definition of “civilian participation”. Arnstein defined the term in an holistic fashion in 1969, suggesting a departure in how this term will apply to the cases of Iceland and Spain. According to him (1969: 216), “the idea of civilian participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you”. The point is that civilian participation should be defined, as Arnstein suggested, by identifying in detail the “have-nots of our time”. In the cases of this paper, the have-nots of their time could be considered “millennials” insofar as they reacted proactively as “smart citizens” (Calzada 2018) to contest corruption and regenerate democracy, without even having the political power and influence to achieve these goals. However, due to turmoil and protest against corruption or welfare state cuts and austerity policies, as Giddens (1998: 75) points out, “civilian participation introduces not only the possibility but also the necessity of forms of democracy other than the orthodox voting process”. Representative, participatory, and deliberative democracy overlap with civilian partici-

pation (Escobar 2017: 418). Hence, this paper distinguishes between two patterns of civilian participation: the mainstream pattern of daily offline and online civilian participation, and the democratic-regeneration-driven pattern characterised by civilian mobilisation and protests, associated with 15M and the Kitchenware Revolution. This paper clearly narrows down and focuses on analysis of the second type of “civilian participation”.

In the same direction, according to Barber (2003: 311), “if democracy is to survive the shrinking of the world and the assaults of a hostile modernity, it will have to rediscover its multiple voices and give citizens, once again, power to speak, decide, and act”. This fact is even more remarkable if we just focus on “millennials” as an entirely self-referential demographic target (Prensky 2001; Sinek 2017; Forbes 2016). Despite the fact that substantial differences are not seen in the weak political engagement among millennials from different Western countries (Bennet 2008), the way in which they participate through digital social networks (so-called “social media”) could vary qualitatively and quantitatively from country to country and when considering specific socio-political events.

This is the case of Iceland’s “Kitchenware Revolution”, or “Pots and Pans Revolution” (Bernburg 2016; Bani 2012), as a series of large-scale, antigovernment protests and riots that took place in Iceland in autumn 2008 and January 2009. These protests took place in the aftermath of a national financial collapse triggered by the global financial crisis in early October 2008. The level of public mobilisation was exceptionally high (about a 25 per cent participation rate), and the protests did not stop until they had brought down the ruling government of Iceland. In this turbulent socio-political context, according to observers, “the role of the Internet, and specifically digital social networks, was absolutely critical, partly because 94 per cent of Icelanders were connected to the Internet, and two-thirds were Facebook users” (Castells 2012: 34). As Casado and Calzada (2015: 20) noted, digital social networks could be understood in the Icelandic context as “liquid” artefacts (as opposed to “solid”, official narratives) that help citizens engage in political storytelling (mythopoetic practices that help citizens understand themselves and their social world) in a collaborative fashion (Boyer 2013; Fillmore-Patrick 2013). As such, a grassroots civic movement that vented its anger through public protest began an unprecedented socially innovative process. Millennials participated, civil society mobilised,

a change of government was provoked, and democratic regeneration benefited from the smallness of the social systemic changes. It goes without saying that this specific event modified Iceland's DNA and existing social values, having direct consequences on reinforcing the "education for citizenship" in the whole country (Bani 2012; Casado and Calzada 2015). Nevertheless, even though a new democratic government was able to rescue the country from a major economic disaster in a short span of time, there is no definitive evidence that "the re-examination process that was opened in 2008 has yet been resolved" (Casado and Calzada 2015: 1).

Paralleling the Icelandic case, on 15 May 2011, political mobilisations in Spain sparked the so-called "15M movement", which not only continues to this day at least informally (Monterde et al. 2015; Anduiza et al. 2009; Tormey and Freenstra 2015; Feixa and Nofre 2015), but also embodied in the new political party, Podemos (Democracy Now 2015). As Castells argues: "The 15M of 2011 had a major impact in the minds of Spanish citizens who overwhelmingly supported the criticism expressed by the movement regarding the political system, and against the management of the economic crisis by political and financial elites" (Castells 2012: 297).

Having said that, the democratic regeneration process initiated by 15M should be distinguished from the conversion of this movement into the political party known today as Podemos (Martín et al. 2012). According to Bauman (2011), 15M is depicted as purely emotional, ignoring the rational side of the movement. In this direction, Anduiza et al. (2012), based on comparative analysis of data gathered in nine demonstrations conducted in Spain between 2010 and 2011, found relevant and significant differences in the characteristics of the 15M case being paradigmatic due to its staging organisations (without formal membership and with scarce resources), its main mobilisation channels (digital social networks), and, finally, the participation of millennials (younger and educated, but less politically involved). The question here remains open: Did 15M contribute to other methods of political participation of millennials in Spain (Micó and Casero-Ripollés 2014; Casero-Ripollés and Feenstra 2012; Masanet et al. 2013)?

Thus, this paper a) examines in-depth the scientific literature and b) explores the potential correlation (Anduiza et al. 2009; Banaji and Buckingham 2010; Barberá and Rivero 2014; Benedicto 2012; Bradwell and Reeves 2008; Brooks and Wa-

ters 2010; Buckingham 2008; Calenda and Meijer 2009; Effing et al. 2011; Gifford 2015; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2012; Ito et al. 2008; Olsson 2013; Subirats et al. 2014) among “digital social networks”, “education for citizenship” and “civilian participation” in these politically dynamic times by comparatively focusing on two socio-political extreme events in Spain and Iceland.

After the 2008 financial crisis, digitally networked movements (Jensen and Bang 2015) that contest austerity policies have been flourishing by problematizing and politicising the causes that have apparently undermined democratic systems by means of particularly remarkable events. However, very little attention has been paid to millennials (Pfanner 2013; Livingston 2003; 2008; Loader et al. 2014) as a specific demographic target that has been fuelling these collective social mobilisation actions, due to the fact that they have been systematically “left out” the system, which, paradoxically, will be defined by their future votes (Fenton 2015). The millennial generation, according to the Pew Research Center (Keeter and Taylor 2009), is defined as everyone born from 1981 to 2000. So, as the first generation to come of age in the new millennium, it should be also analysed from the “prosumer” perspective, as this generation neither feels its democratic voices are heard in the system, nor is satisfied with the rising unevenness in people’s lives.

Hence, “education for citizenship” could be updated through democratic regeneration processes, which provide a better understanding of the “life cycle effect” of millennials and their life expectations (Keeter and Taylor 2009). Education for citizenship has a short history encompassing diverse writings, including sociology, psychology, education, and politics. There are a number of conceptual and intellectual positions from which to consider such timely questions. This is not a problem to be solved, but rather a business condition associated with these phenomena.

In this paper, therefore, the author will explore the following research question: In general, do digital social networks foster civilian participation among millennials under specific politically changing circumstances? In normal circumstances in mainstream civilian participation, according to updated results by Navarro (2017: 1), “the feelings of the (young) individuals, some personal reasons and the configuration of their personal social network and their perception of the network of social support, are influential variables of this

behavior, and are influenced in turn by personality such as extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness”. To provide some empirical, evidence-based case studies regarding politically changing circumstances in the extreme democratic regeneration patterns of millennials, this paper depicts two cases in which millennial civilian participation (Subirats et al. 2014) is involved with regard to ongoing political and democratic regeneration and re-examination processes such as 15M and its most recent consequence – the Podemos “effect” in Spain (Democracy Now 2015; Innerarity 2015; Flesher 2017; Monterde 2012; Subirats 2012; 2011; Casero-Ripollés and Feenstra 2012) – and the Kitchenware Revolution and its implicit, but not overt, constitutional challenge (Bani 2012; Boyer 2013; Fillmore-Patrick 2013) in Iceland (Calzada 2015, 2017).

#### RATIONALE: MILLENNIALS, DIGITAL SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION

One of the key debates in “education for citizenship” is, precisely, the use of ICTs. Do they help or hinder? What do we do with them? In what ways can ICTs be used to build up powerful, impactful resources to engage “millennials” on smart citizenship issues? What does it mean to be “good” at ICT as a citizen (Calzada 2018; Cobo 2016; Finn 2017; Hartcourt 2015)?

Moreover, there is no doubt that the future of democracy and its regeneration are closely related to ICT, specifically to the use of the Internet to promote more active civilian participation – greater civic, social, and political participation, which is at the core of democracy, even in very controversial realms, such as those presented in this paper (Chadwick 2006; Chadwick and Howard 2009). Nevertheless, there is a need to clarify some of the assumptions made while searching the literature from the last few years in this field. This is an emerging topic – from a variety of approaches with different assumptions – that leaves room for further research pathways structured in three sections.

First, it is noteworthy that there are links to be researched between political apathy, civilian participation, and democratic regeneration. Buckingham (2008); Caseró-Ripollés and Feenstra (2012); Hindman (2009); Mossberger et al. (2008); Norris (1999; 2002); Subirats (2012); among others, have examined the current notion of politics using a critical perspective, in which democracy stands in the centre of the analysis.

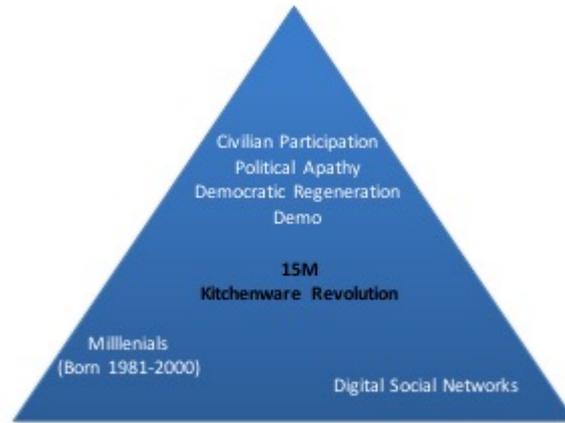


Fig. 1. Millennials, digital social networks, and civilian participation.

Second, special attention is paid to the young population, here in this paper addressed as so-called “millennials” or “digital natives” (Keeter and Taylor 2009; Pfanner 2013), although any kind of interpretation remains unclear thus far. They might represent the main characters necessary in political mobilisation in order to undertake democratic revision, possibly forcing the alteration of current underlying value issues by following, in many cases, digital and political disobedience principles (Harcourt 2015). In this section, there is a fixed assumption that millennials do not participate in politics. However, as we are going to observe in the two cases presented, millennials in a democracy may produce their own forms of apathy. Here, a question remains unanswered: How is it possible that current democracies could engage in such massive and pervasive data collection, data mining, surveillance, and control of their citizens (Keyes 2004; Mitnick and Vamosi 2017; Orwell 1950)? Here, the paper advances the technological and democratic paradox that directly affects education for citizenship: Will millennials engage in civilian participation just because they could alter the DNA of our liberal democracies? For this discussion, we should mention the contributions made by Calenda and Meijer (2009), Collin (2008), Livingstone (2003; 2008), Masanet et al. (2013), Wallace and Benedict (2009).

Finally, in the last few years, an increasing amount of analytical research has been carried out regarding digital social networks under the “Web 2.0 paradigm” (Rohr 2014). There is enormous interest in analysing how efficient ICT tools are in reinforcing political mobilisation and, as a result, civilian participation. It should be pointed out that Twitter is presented as the most important tool in the digital social networking toolkit (Barberá and Rivero 2014; Effing et al. 2011). This paper will focus on how digital social networks (Boyd and Ellison 2007), especially Twitter (Gainous and Wagner 2014) in Spain and Facebook (Castells 2012) in Iceland, contributed to some of the contested periods in the specific events that occurred in both countries. Accordingly, there have been relevant contributions in this new field made by Gainous and Wagner (2014).

Hence, this paper aims to review research concerning how digital social networks in the hands of young users (millennials) contribute to fostering civilian participation by sampling two democratic regeneration socio-political events in rather different contexts (Hertie School of Governance 2017).

According to the literature review by the author, this paper will start with some data from Spain. Ninety-three per cent of Spanish Internet users access social networks. Facebook is the most popular (83 per cent of all users), and 84 per cent of smartphone users access social networks on a daily basis (Injuve 2011). In Spain, there is an established tradition of citizen mobilisation (though not necessarily participation) using technology. After the Al Qaeda attacks in Madrid on 11 March 2004 (11M), when 191 people died and approximately 2,000 were wounded, there was a massive public display of condemnation organised through the use of text messages to protest the Partido Popular (PP) government’s position on the attacks. This mobilisation resulted in the PP’s loss in the general election held on 14 March 2004.

In 2011, the 15M movement, with the support of digital social networks, became a symbol of citizen protest against government policies during the financial crisis. In fact, 15M went beyond Spanish frontiers and spread to other Western cities (e.g., London, New York). In any case, in Spain, digital social networks have been used on occasion to express citizen’s indignation and to mobilise both large and small groups (Castells 2009; Cortés 2011), but they are not as effective in the promotion of long-term, consistent citizen participation, as we will notice throughout this paper.

Similarly, Iceland was the first country hit by the 2008 financial crisis, with dramatic democratic consequences (Calzada 2015; Bani 2012). These consequences “were channelled by the spark of the Kitchenware Revolution propagated through social media sites such as Facebook” according to Castells (2012: 34). People demonstrated a collective defence of the means for social and communitarian wellbeing in favour of a democratic regeneration process, an institutional reset, and even a deep constitutional change.

The hypothesis of this paper regards the role that millennials played in both cases by being connected and igniting the spark of the democratic regeneration process. To better understand how millennials involve themselves in civilian participation events using digital social networks, a global overview since the events of some facts and data about their penetration into the Internet and their digital social network behaviour patterns is presented as follows:

One report from the Pew Research Center (2010) shows that 93 per cent of American teenagers and young adults use the Internet, and that 73 per cent of American teenagers and young adults have profiles on social network sites. In the UK, data from Ofcom has presented similar results. Ofcom’s research (2015) shows that Internet use has continued to grow, with the average adult Internet user estimating that they now spend almost 17 hours online every week (16.8 hours per week, up from 15.1 in 2011).

Regarding the young European population, according to the CivicWeb European project (CivicWeb 2009), 90 per cent use the Internet on a general basis. Yet, just 15 per cent asserted their interest in civic websites and blogs. To illustrate this low interest in civic matters (CivicWeb 2009: 49), we observe that only a very small group of respondents reported using the Internet for online civic or political participation. Within this apparent overall lack of active participation online, everything to do with party politics and government drew the least amount of attention from the young respondent population in this project (fig. 2).

Generally speaking, civilian participation has traditionally been determined with differentiations among demographic and socioeconomic factors (D-Cent 2017). Accordingly, the citizens who participate most actively are middle-aged and have high socioeconomic and educational levels (Empodera.org 2015). In contrast, it is young people of low socioeconomic and educational levels who participate the least (Benedicto

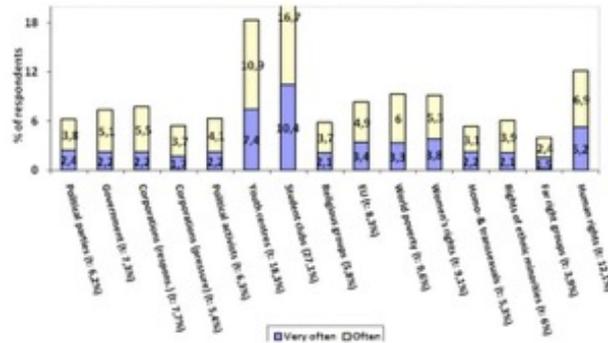


Fig. 2. How young people (“millennials”) use the civic potential of the Internet (CivicWeb 2009).

2012; Bennett 2008). Some reports show modest signs that Internet use could be another means by which to promote both on- and offline participation (Charman-Anderson 2010). Precisely because millennials have grown up with, and interact through, digital social networks, we are presented with a substantially relevant means of encouraging civilian participation.

Having said that, as Cortés (2011), Monterde (2012), Feixa and Nofre (2013) argue, in specific extreme socio-political contexts (Gluck and Brandt 2015), such as Spain’s 15M protests and Iceland’s Kitchenware Revolution – as well as other mobilisations such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement – there is great potential to examine to what extent digital social networks did or did not encourage greater social participation, as compared with traditional forms of “unplugged” participation (Calzada and Cobo 2015; Moeller et al. 2012; Turkle 2011).

A crucial preliminary difficulty, although we cannot go into detail here, is in the terminology used in the bibliography. Speed of change is also important in this area, particularly in technology (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2016). Why should we address this issue? Not only because it is a contemporary topic that is not merely technical or educational, but also because the Internet use can help promote online and offline participation, especially among millennials. Another difficulty is the lack of updated datasets for these collective behaviors in Spain and in Iceland. In the appendix a content analysis of the term

“social media” is showed to better compare both cases through the views of the most updated authors: Bernburg (2016) in Iceland and Monterde et al. (2015) in Spain.

According to a widespread agreement in research findings, there is certainly evidence of digital social networks’s impact so far (Christakis and Fowler 2009). A correlation exists between civic participation (represented by the number of activities engaged in, both online and offline) and socioeconomic status. However, this paper goes beyond this mainstream hypothesis insofar as it considers two extreme civilian mobilisation events for its analysis, which provides another angle for analysis. While millennials who participate the least consist of young people with low socioeconomic, educational levels, and qualifications, in the two studied events, which could be shaped under the democratic regeneration pattern, contradict this. Millennials who engaged in these protests represented a wide range of populations with diverse socioeconomic and educational levels. Thus, the hypothesis of this paper suggests some extreme democratic regeneration events, such as 15M and the Kitchenware Revolution, differ from typical civilian participation patterns due to three factors: a) the protest is shaped as an accumulation of emotional digital communications between diverse segments of the population (Injuve 2011); b) millennials are especially engaged in these activities as never before, by considering their historical period effect; and c) digital social networks channelled this outrage and hope in a unique way (Castells 2012).

#### HYPOTHESIS: MAINSTREAM CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION VS. EXTREME DEMOCRATIC REGENERATION PATTERNS OF MILLENNIALS

In this section, this paper elaborates on the division between the two participatory patterns of millennials: the mainstream pattern of daily offline and online civilian participation of millennials and the critically based and democratic-regeneration-driven pattern characterised by civilian mobilisations and protests, associated with 15M and the Kitchenware Revolution.

The main trend of millennials in the data coincides with the timing of the two events. The Pew Review Report was released in 2009, one year after the Kitchenware Revolution (2008) and two years before 15M (2011). However, a new and

updated estimation could be obtained by following more recent surveys, like the one provided by Deloitte (2017). However, the aim of this paper is to analyse the main trends and the potential correlation between the two cases. Further longitudinal research could be conducted through in-depth interviews, focus groups and/or data analytics, to measure the real effect of these extreme events in the democratic systems of Iceland and Spain. This is not clearly the aim of this paper.

Regarding the first pattern, the Pew Review Report (Smith et al. 2009) shows four main findings. This study examined online and offline political engagement and paid special attention to the role of social networking sites in people's political activities. The four main findings were: a) class differences, especially those related to educational attainment, are prominent in all kinds of political engagement; b) there has been major growth in political activity on digital social networks between 2008 and this survey in 2009; c) for most politically active digital social network users, social networking sites are not separate realms of political activity; these users are frequently active in other aspects of civic life, as well; d) even as online platforms have become more prominent in political affairs, Americans' day-to-day political conversations mostly occur offline.

Many digital social networks have been attributed potential for fostering socialization and membership in a community (Guibernau 2013). However, there are contradictory research results as to whether they are really influencing the development of civilian participation at different levels of intensity.

In reference to Internet use, the Pew Internet study (2013) shows modest evidence of the influence of digital social networks in prompting changes toward more participative attitudes and civic involvement. Among its most striking findings is that online activity reflects the same type of behaviours and tendencies that we observe in real life based on a range of criteria: age, socioeconomic status, broadband access, etc. Moreover, this study shows a strong correlation between civilian participation (online and offline) and socioeconomic status. However, when young people are compared to older people, the differences in participation between these age collectives are reduced slightly if online activity is compared, partly owing to the fact that young people are more inclined to use the Internet, although older people continue to be more participative overall than their younger counterparts are. The youngest individuals (18-24 years) are the least involved in civ-

ic activities, less so than the most senior adults (64+ years). The youngest survey candidates only surpass the most senior ones if they are compared in terms of online activity.

As with the Ofcom report (2015), the Pew study (Smith et al. 2009) offers some clues that indicate that the use of blogs or digital social networking sites could, perhaps, change the belief that socioeconomic status is a decisive factor of participation. This data leads us to believe that it is not inevitable that people with higher income levels are most committed to civic and/or political issues. We should not forget that it is millennials who are the most involved in online activities, such as blogs and digital social networks, and data shows that civically committed blog and digital social network users are more active in offline situations when compared to other Internet users.

The impact that these new tools may have on the future of online politics will largely depend on how millennials behave. Thus, Smith et al., (2009) ask whether we are witnessing a generational change that will affect how young people behave, or whether new technologies will continue to leave people with lower incomes and education levels behind.

Indeed, this is what the author of this paper attempts to examine: whether, in light of some extreme events with remarkable potential to alter the democratic system, millennial civilian participation increases are fostered by outstanding use of digital social networks. In the following sections, data from 15M and the Kitchenware Revolution will be compared in order to provide evidence-based findings.

## RESEARCH QUESTION: DO DIGITAL SOCIAL NETWORKS FOSTER CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION AMONG MILLENNIALS?

Given the analysis presented, we might ask ourselves what can be done from an educational, democratic, and political perspective, and from the point of view of the media, to encourage greater social involvement. Although the data is not conclusive, there are indications that Internet access is partly responsible for permitting greater participation by facilitating and promoting activities that ensure citizens' voices are heard and partially overcoming socioeconomic and educational barriers (Rorh 2014).

It has been demonstrated that millennials are avid consumers of technology, that they grow up and mature surrounded by technology, and that, to some extent, their ways of conceiving citizenship and participation in society are changing. At the same time, it can be seen that they participate less in certain civic activities than their elders do.

Along with Bennett (2008), this paper maintains that:

If nothing is done [...], the default scenario is likely to be the persistent disconnection of the youth from conventional politics, with little reconciliation of the gap between AC [actualizing citizen] and DC [dutiful citizen] citizenship styles, and continuing unproductive paradigm battles in the academic world. [...]. A second scenario utilizes the possibilities for convergence of technologies and political practices to bring vibrant experiences of politics into classrooms, youth programmes and, yes, even elections, showing young people how their concerns can gain public voice within the conventional arenas of power and decision making (Bennett 2008: 21).

To achieve greater participation among young people (NoMyPlace 2015), various authors (Bennett 2008; Boyd and Ellison 2007) present a series of suggestions for different collectives. The idea is that in order to engage in political life, people must first have access to public life. Young people need an audience, whether networked or physical (Calzada and Cobo 2015), before they can engage in political life. Politics start first in school and among friends and family; then, they go on to centre on citizenship. Pushing the other way will not work. It must start with the dramas that make sense to contextualising this political experience beyond technodeterministic understandings (Calzada 2017; McChesney 2013; Morozov 2012).

The moment has come to ask what we can reasonably be expected from the Internet, from digital social networks, from ICTs, and from democracy in the deepest political crises (Castells 2009; Chadwick 2006; Charman-Anderson 2010; Christakis and Fowler 2009; Eggers 2013; Morozov 2012; Turkle 2011; Shirky 2009; Sennett 2012; Williams 1983; Innerarity 2013). In this direction, at present we can even talk about the emancipatory virtues of the Internet, but without ignoring its limits, including its dark side (Ippolita 2013; Orwell 1950; McChesney 2013; Richey and Taylor 2018). We must update the concepts of technique, power (Castells 2009), and democracy that underlie the utopia that has appeared alongside the development of the Internet (Aranda et al. 2015). This utopia is a kind of

deterministic concept hiding within the social context. Although, this utopic current reality should be built with dominant technological artefacts created and designed in a specific socio-technical paradigm (Eggers 2013: 10), such as the one described in *The Circle*: “that if something’s free, then we’re the product”. This present paradigm sometimes forgets what Raymond Williams (1983: 128) suggested, “technology is never neutral, it has the potential and capacity to be used socially and politically for quite different purposes”. Similarly, Sennett (2012) reminded us of the real values in which political behaviour lies, regardless of the “myth of the digital democracy” (Hindam 2009).

Therein lies the importance of analysing how the Internet has modified power relationships without eliminating them. In fact, the Internet has a two-fold nature. On the one hand, it has a critical and destabilising function; but on the other hand, it has the capacity for democratic construction and regeneration, as the researched cases depict. The Internet appears as a new space, as a new social modality. But, as authors suggest (Gladwell 2013; O’Neil 2016), a more critical culture is needed to use ICT. This is what is usually called “digital humanism”. A new digital culture is strongly required, and as Buckingham states (2008), this discourse and praxis should be forecast even further when it refers to millennials. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the EU project D-Cent (2014) has been exploring new technological communitarian approaches to tackling new pathways of democratic regeneration, in addition to those in Iceland and in Spain, by particularly analysing the politically innovative consequences of the Kitchenware Revolution and 15M (Calzada 2013; Empodera.org 2015; Fenton 2015). The Internet as a new space should be combined with another three elements: democracy, civilian participation, and social transformation/mobilisation (Subirats 2012). Digital social networks, as the most popular form of ICT, have conquered the social sphere by democratising their use. However, these new devices depict some dysfunctions, such as cyber-fetishism and socio-phobia or the main sickness of our time: being “alone” (Turkle 2011) while we are apparently “together” (Sennett 2012).

Thus, the Internet is not itself creating the context in which people can create new political and civilian senses of belonging (Guibernau 2014) insofar as some “unplugged” (Calzada and Cobo 2015) physical spaces in which social capital (Putnam 2001) could emerge spontaneously and randomly

are not ensured. However, and here is the hypothesis of this paper, when the physical context in the city enables the adoption of a collective action driven by a democratic and politically legitimate protest, digital social networks enhance civilian participation by producing a communitarian sense of belonging, as a “liquid democracy”. But, how do millennials behave in these specific emotional contexts in response to political mobilisation? Are they entirely “digital natives” (Pfanner 2013)? Why do they engage in activities such as crowd-sourced demonstrations?

According to Masanet et al.: “Serious deficiencies are demonstrated among Spanish youth in relation to their degree of media competence, understood as the capacity to interpret messages in an insightful and critical manner and to express themselves through various codes with a minimum of errors and creativity” (Masanet et al. 2013: 231).

That brings us to the critical analysis of how the mere use of digital social networks could not mean being able to participate, decide, and achieve a set of criteria in regard to political values and action. Morozov (2012: xiv) bitterly and critically begins his book: “This book is an attempt to come to terms with this ideology as well as a warning against the pernicious influence that it has had and is likely to continue to have on democracy promotion”.

Hence, a deeper comparative analysis is required in the following section with regard to millennials’ civilian participation through their use of digital social networks in relation to the Kitchenware Revolution in 2008 in Iceland and 15M in 2011 in Spain.

## EMPIRICAL CASE STUDIES’ BENCHMARKING: COMPARING THE KITCHENWARE REVOLUTION IN ICELAND AND 15M IN SPAIN

Civilian participation matters to millennials. According to Loader et al. (2014: 2), “the accusations that young people are politically apathetic and somehow failing in their duty to participate in many democratic societies worldwide have been refuted by a growing number of academics in recent years”.

As has been presented in this paper, Kitchenware Revolution and 15M (Castells 2012: 20) “represent cases of democratic regeneration, from which we could arise relevant research conclusions for the future use of digital social networks

in transforming politics”. In summary, these demonstrations showed that instead of superficial civilian participation processes, these cases fuelled deeper values underlying the issues in their given contexts. As can be read in some 15M proclamations: “This is not just a crisis, it is simply that I do not love you”. Similarly, in Iceland, “the movement(s) went from cyberspace to urban spaces, and the original spaces of resistance were formed on the Internet” (Castells 2012: 45).

The synthetic analytical table below provides comparatively brief, evidence-based qualitative data about the two events. Although the aim of this paper is not a deep analysis, further complementary reading can be found by Casado and Calzada (2015). In the appendix, two main authors’ contributions (Bernburg 2016; Monterde et al. 2015) have been presented by conducting content analysis on the keyword “social media”. Though the main term used in this paper has been “digital social networks”, to better contextualise and compare the cases, in the appendix quotations extracted from both texts are gathered.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, here are the five concluding remarks of this paper: a) Insofar as the lack of consensus in the definition and understanding of the concept of “millennials” and/or “digital natives” among the main authors presented, this paper argues that the potential influential role that digital social networks could attain among this young population segment is insufficiently explained in the literature. As such, despite the fact that there is abundant literature analysing how technology could foster civilian participation, little could be concluded with regard to millennials and/or digital natives; b) In these two specific events in two very diverse contexts – the Kitchenware Revolution in Iceland on 6 October 2008 and 15M in Spain on 15 May 2011 – the participation of millennials and/or digital natives was outstanding, particularly due to the use of digital social networks, such as Facebook in Iceland (Huffington Post 2009) and Twitter in Spain (Peña-López et al. 2014). Assuming that a considerable number of protester in both cases were “millennials”, in the appendix the uses of “social media” and its effects are distinguished. Whereas Bernburg (2016) highlights the nature of the new unaffiliated and independent actors as individuals, intellectuals, or even

small groups, Monterde et al. (2015) underline the networked and collective nature of the aggregation of individuals. Yet when it comes to comparing reactions of “millennials”, the link with the education and social values in both locations seems obvious. The rationale of these reactions are entirely connected with the beginning of this paper, as they are linked to “education for citizenship” and its value system. Hence, we could suggest as a working hypothesis that digital social networks among millennials uniquely fostered civilian participation in both cases. While the Kitchenware Revolution sparked a reaction based on a one-to-one system of relations, the 15M Movement set up – consciously or unconsciously – a collective identity through a multilayered structure of the demos; c) In the literature, the civilian participation of millennials and/or digital natives in daily life has been analysed by focusing on the effects of the Internet on reinforcement and mobilisation. However, there is a complementary impact on mobilisation in cases that are not mainstream, daily, mundane, and routine participation. We could thus suggest that, in cases responding to an extreme socio-political stimulus, such as the two presented in this paper, pre-existing proclivity to engage in extra-representational modes of participation has been detected. This is made clearer by analysing the role that Facebook and Twitter played in both cases among millennials and/or digital natives when the cause of civilian participation in these events was unrest. In both cases, when unrest could not be channelled through representative and formal participation – minor parties, unions, non-governmental organisations – extra-representative participation arose. It is in this case when digital social networks foster civilian participation among millennials. However, it is too soon to tell whether these networked citizen politics will address increasing civilian participation by millennials and/or digital natives beyond the exceptionality of the extreme cases presented (Bradwell and Reeves 2008). Shall mainstream, routine, and mundane politics be altered and thus enriched by another kind of network-driven active participation led by millennials and/or digital natives? Which is the role of “education for citizenship” in this democratic endeavour? d) Hence, digital social networks could initially foster civilian participation in extreme mobilisations, although extreme mobilisations themselves do not necessarily lead to improved political representation of millennials and/or digital natives; e) According to current research on the challenges faced by western democracies, since the beginning of the

2008-2009 economic crisis, particularly in Iceland and Spain, citizens “have lost confidence in key institutions” (Hertie School of Governance 2017: 15). By contrast, the politics and the power of the Internet through digital social networks are stepping into a “liquid” and unknown algorithmic path (Finn 2017), which suggests that the digital behaviour of millennials, will be key to better reacting towards democratic regeneration dynamics (Richey and Taylor 2018). However, it remains unclear how education could prepare smart citizens to self-organise when democratic systems depict their own endogenous failures. So far, digital social networks or social media have been studied as a mediated artefact to foster collective action. In the near future, the survival of democracy will require further unpacking the link between the social media behaviour of millennials and the way the techno-politics of data is already altering perception and action towards relevant political decisions. The Kitchenware Revolution and 15M demonstrate the way collective actions driven by younger potential voters could preliminarily regenerate a whole democratic system, but without giving them the political representation to transform the socio-political architecture as a whole.

Ultimately, the cases analysed show that the correlation between socioeconomic and educational status and Internet usage of millennials and/or digital natives does not exist, given their plural and overarching participation regardless of their social profiles. For this reason, education for citizenship should be considered a critical element connected to real political and democratic regenerations and the challenges of current cities and societies.

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## APPENDIX

*Summary of Iceland and Spain events: Kitchenware Revolution and 15M*

| EUROPEAN COUNTRY  | ICELAND  | SPAIN   |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Sources of the crisis</i>  | Financial and then political   | Institutional, Political, and Financial   |
| <i>Date of the event</i>  | 6 October 2008   | 15 May 2011   |
| <i>Spark of the crisis</i>  | Financial collapse   | Cumulative corruption cases   |
| <i>Particular Event</i>   | Kitchenware Revolution   | 15M   |
| <i>Mobilisation phases</i>  | a) Protests<br>b) Democratic regeneration<br>c) Constitutional change  | a) <i>Indignados</i><br>b) PAH (Platform for Mortgage Victims)<br>c) <i>Podemos</i>   |
| <i>Direct outcome</i>   | Social constitutionalism   | New party: <i>Podemos</i>   |
| <i>% of millennials/ digital natives (born after 1980) per total of population (Eurostat 2017; Pew Research, 2015)</i>  | 13.9%  | 8.3%  |
| <i>Millennials' digital social network participation</i>  | Via Facebook<br>(Castells, 2012; Huffington Post, 2009)  | Via Twitter<br>(Peña-López, et al., 2014)   |
| <i>Content Analysis through the Quotes on the term social media via the research conducted by Bernburg (2016) for Kitchenware Revolution case and by Monterde et al. (2015) for the 15M case.</i> | <p>#1: "New actors unaffiliated with formal movements have played major roles in the protests, in conjunction with the 'usual' grass-root activists and radical leftists. A major reason for this development may be that <i>social media</i> networking sites have become major arenas of protest mobilization, enabling individual actors and small groups to perform mobilization work and innovate effectively (Postill 2014: 20).</p> <p>#2: "Third, I interviewed individuals (intellectuals, social critics) who were prominent in framing the crisis in the public debate, that is, in the news and <i>social media</i>. [...] These include protest organizers and ground-level activists as well as intellectuals and critics who spoke at public meetings and appeared in the news and <i>social media</i> to frame the crisis" (24).</p> <p>#3: "The message of the meetings, which reached the news and spread via <i>social media</i>, was that Iceland's long-standing political leadership had led the nation into crisis" (68).</p> <p>#4: "Via <i>social media</i>, separate groups jointly announced that a 'national assembly' would be held on Arnarhóll" (75).</p> <p>#5: "The main instigators were independent actors who relied on informal networks and <i>social media</i> to mobilize others in challenge against the authorities" (89).</p> | <p>#1: "The emergence of network-movements since 2011 has opened the debate around the way in which <i>social media</i> and networked practices make possible innovative forms of collective identity" (930).</p> <p>#2: "Juris (2012) argues that <i>social media</i> contributed to an 'emerging logic of aggregation' during the first stages of the Occupy movement; that is, the <i>social media</i> supported the swift congregation of individual protesters in physical spaces, especially camps in squares" (931).</p> <p>#3: "A systemic (Luhmann 1995) approach to collective identity would try to analyse how activity in circuits such as <i>social media</i> networks shape the operational unity and cohesion of a movement, both synchronically and diachronically" (932).</p> <p>#4: "<i>Social media</i> activities and the resulting high media profile of its spokesperson, Ada Colau" (934).</p> <p>#5: "According to some polls, by early 2015, <i>Podemos</i> had become Spain's first political party in vote intention (Metroscopia 2015). Both of them make intensive use of <i>social media</i> for the construction and spreading of their narratives and organization" (935).</p> |

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#6: "Finally, interviewees talked about how their networks of strong and weak social ties formed important communication networks via *social media*" (135).

#7: "Furthermore, the interviews revealed the pivotal role of *social media* (e.g. Facebook) in spreading information on upcoming events. *Social media* networks, which span large networks of strong and weak social ties, made it possible for small groups to plan protest events at short notice and quickly spread the word. Many interviewees mentioned *social media* in this way. Twenty-year-old activist Ágúst: The best way to get people to an organized protest" (137).

#8: "Thus, illustrating the role of social incentives (McAdam and Paulsen 1993), committed protesters encouraged friends and family to protest; some protested only in the company of friends, family, or co-workers; social networks became communication networks (including via *social media*) about upcoming events; and the protest site, at times, became an exciting location to meet with friends and acquaintances" (149).

#9: "In the middle of the turmoil caused by the collapse of the three Icelandic banks, inspired by a perception of the problematic present and emotional need among the public to define the crisis, and by their pre-existing political goals, a handful of individuals used informal ties and *social media* to call on people to come to public meetings in midtown Reykjavik to define the crisis" (160).

#10: "As scholars studying protests in various national contexts in recent years have observed (Postill 2014; Tufekci and Wilson 2012), *social media* communication technology made it possible for independent actors and small groups to plan and effectively use informal networks to spread information about protest events, often at very short notice" (161).

#11: "Illustrating social incentives entailed in social ties (McCarthy and Paulsen 1993), committed protesters encouraged friends and family to protest; some protested only in the company of friends, family, or co-workers; social networks became communication networks (including via *social media*) about upcoming events; and the protest site, at times, became an exciting location to meet with friends and acquaintances" (167).

#12: "I obtained fifty samples of *social media* discussion among activists. Finally, a sample of protest performances was obtained via news media, YouTube, and semi-structured interviews. I coded all the texts and performances for thematic content, following the method of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967)" (187).

#6: "Although the 15M identity operates through a multilayered structure (from offline interactions to mass and *social media*) (Toret et al. 2015), we have chosen to study the structure of Facebook networks supporting the movement as a proxy for its overall network structure, since, according to our survey, up to 78.8% of 15M participants used Facebook for activities related to the movement" (937).

#7: "Synchronization through *social media* cannot be seen just as a homogeneous reaction to, or amplification, of external events" (942).

#8: "In this regard, it is important to underline that 15M arose with few attachments to pre-existing identities (Candón Mena 2013; Toret et al. 2015), relying on intensive deployment of *social media* for the continuous construction of its emerging, shared systemic identity (a traditional constructivist condition in terms of Melucci 1988; 1996)" (944).

#9: "In other words, the intensive use of *social media* and related sociotechnical practices have brought about a specific form of collective identity from the macroscopic to macro-level perspective, at the 'movement layer': multitudinous identities" (945).

#10: "We have shown that a constructivist logic of collective identity can be built along the lines of direct participation in a multitudinous identity. And, although rarely in an academic idiom, 15M *indignados* are aware of it. Both in its origins and throughout its development, 15M has defended the internet, *social media* and certain practices in them as conditions for democracy (Candón Mena 2013; Padilla 2013); Toret et al. 2015).

#11: "We have applied it to a context to intensive *social media* use where we can no longer reduce the system to one-to-one relations among individuals, groups or collective initiatives as unities" (946).

#12: "As systemic understanding and operational treatment of the complex structure and dynamics displayed by networked movements is slowly emerging, potentially enriching the view of collective identities in the *social media* era" (947).



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