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Edu-communicative practices in initial teacher education: promoting citizen participation through digital social networks

Prácticas educomunicativas en la formación inicial docente: el fomento de la participación ciudadana a través de las redes sociales digitales

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Abstract

We connect three analytical fields converging in the current context of digital transition: educational challenges in democratic values, citizen participation and digital social networks. By adopting the approach of social practice theories, and from a substantially qualitative design, we analyse and discuss edu-communicative practices as a unit of socio-educational intervention in improving citizen participation. By relating the three fundamental elements of social practice (ways of thinking, material conditions and competences) with the actors who perform the action (university students), we reveal the ways in which social networks are integrated within the edu-communicative practice. Our results confirm that the major factors limiting a creative and critical edu-communicative practice are: lack of appropriation of social networks as a learning space; the predominantly playful use of social networks; and the undue weight of formality within the educational context. The conclusions highlight how the use of social networks (materiality) is conditioned by their meanings, with a predominance of practices mediated by the formality of the educational institution. The implications for the educational institution are also discussed, suggesting fewer reproductive and more transformative edu-communicative practices.

Keywords

Citizenship; education for participation; edu-communication; practices; social media; digital transition

Resumen

Conectamos tres campos analíticos que confluyen en el actual contexto de transición digital, a saber, los retos educativos en valores democráticos, la participación ciudadana y las redes sociales digitales. Adoptando el enfoque de las teorías de prácticas sociales, y desde un diseño esencialmente cualitativo, analizamos y discutimos las prácticas educomunicativas como unidad de intervención socioeducativa para mejorar la participación ciudadana. Poniendo en relación los tres elementos fundamentales de la práctica social (modos de pensar, condiciones materiales y competencias) con las personas que ejecutan la acción (estudiantes de universidad), desvelamos las formas de integración de las redes sociales (RRSS) en la práctica educomunicativa. Nuestros resultados constatan que los principales factores limitantes para una práctica educomunicativa creativa y crítica son la falta de apropiación de las redes sociales como espacio de aprendizaje, el predominio del uso lúdico de las redes sociales y el excesivo peso de la formalidad del contexto educativo. Las conclusiones remarcan cómo el uso de las RRSS (materialidad) está condicionado por sus significados, predominando prácticas mediadas por la formalidad de la institución educativa. También se discuten las implicaciones para la institución educativa, sugiriendo prácticas educomunicativas integradoras, menos reproductoras y más transformadoras.

Palabras clave

Ciudadanía; educación para la participación; educomunicación; prácticas; redes sociales; transición digital.

1. Introduction

Citizenship education has been recognised as one of the undeniable purposes of education (UNESCO, 2015). The need to determine how to educate on and for civic participation (CP) to ensure engagement in areas that directly affect an individual's life – economics, politics or culture – remains a necessary question in the classrooms of democratic countries – as well as in universities. European policies have the goal of fostering civic engagement and democratic debate, especially among young people, and they focus on empowering citizens to ensure real, safe and ethical participation in public life (European Commission, 2020a).

CP provides new developmental scenarios within the framework of the digital transition of the 21st century. In both European and Spanish contexts, policies have been implemented to promote and direct the digital transformation within the education system, recognising its importance for working and everyday life. These policies focus on the creation of material conditions to guarantee access to digital spaces and the development of digital competences within and beyond the education system (European Commission, 2021; 2020b; 2022; Government of Spain, 2020; 2021; LOSU, 2023). However, improvements have not been specifically targeted at CP. Consequently, the debate on the educational-communicative role of digital social networks (hereinafter DSSN) in educational contexts remains open, specifically with regard to Education for Civic Participation (ECP).

Neither the issue of integrating new demands and digital technology platforms in the classroom (Arthur and Davinson, 2000), nor the question of how to educate through participatory environments that generate dialogue with political repercussions to strengthen democracy (Castellanos-Claramunt, 2019) are new academic debates. Extensive literature exists, especially in the fields of education for participation (García-Pérez, 2021; Estelles, Romero and Amo, 2021) and CP and social media (López-de-Ayala and Vizcaíno-Laorga, 2021; Medranda-Morales et al., 2020). In the latter field, digital media are understood as action tools for understanding and transforming the world (Báez-Pérez, Begnini-Domínguez and Espinosa-Cevallos, 2023) and "inescapable spaces for current democratic processes, mainly among young people who grew up under the digital paradigm" (Maltos-Tamez, Martínez-Garza and Miranda-Villanueva, 2021: 46); however, youth and the rest of society share a lack of participatory culture (Escobedo, Sales and Traver-Martí, 2017).

Digitalisation in a 5.0 society provides new opportunities for educational institutions with regard to ECP, but it also presents significant challenges.

Regarding these challenges, the academic literature stresses that educational institutions should serve as spaces that promote CP by valuing the opinion of citizens and offering resources and strategies aimed at jointly solving problems to improve their lives (Sales et al., 2018). Thus, real participation implies social commitment and involvement in global problems, requiring the ability to link the acquired knowledge with social intervention (García-Pérez, 2021).

It is evident that the concept of CP is linked to that of being social. Therefore, it is related to the innate predisposition to interact and socialise for the purpose of social improvement. However, active participation in the civic context requires permission, i.e. it demands participatory mechanisms for joint decision-making from institutions. Studies on the institutionalisation of CP in participatory democracies highlight the advantage of less ambiguity in the rules regulating participatory processes. However, they note that excessive institutionalisation of social participatory processes may affect democratic quality (Pano-Yáñez, Pacheco-Lupercio and Sucozhañay-Calle, 2023).

Likewise, the educational institution, in its ideal role as a space for the promotion of CP, would be responsible for achieving the most harmonious developments in the practices that it develops, specifically in the integration of its material, face-to-face and virtual conditions. Regarding this, the literature has been especially critical when describing the process as the "virtualisation of face-to-face", reduced to the inclusion of non-face-to-face formats in conventional teaching (Sánchez-Vera, Prendes-Espinosa and Serrano-Sánchez, 2011).

As for the opportunities offered by digital media, and specifically social media, educational institutions tend to argue that they encourage student participation and experimentation in the classroom due to their high capacity to motivate students (Santoveña-Casal & Bernal-Bravo, 2019). Thus, consensus exists regarding its educational value (Chamba-Rueda, Armas and Pardo-Cueva, 2023) and pedagogical potential (Scott, Sorokti, and Merrell, 2016). It is believed that what has been referred to as *Relationship, Information and Communication Technologies* (IRCT) offers a new space for educommunicative action, serving as an opportunity for participation, significantly stimulating playful learning and enabling the development of critical and creative competences (Marta-Lazo, Marfil-Carmona and Hergueta-Covacho, 2016). It also emphasises how social media may connect higher education institutions to remote and/or crisis areas, offering a safe learning environment with attractive platforms, and a quality

education that does not display differences in student performance as compared to face-to-face settings (Noesgaard and Ørngreen, 2015).

In short, the literature suggests that the educational use of social media may have a positive impact on improving community, political and cultural participation in each environment (Moreno-Freites and Ziritt-Trejo, 2019) by increasing the students' degree of social responsibility (Erazo-Rodríguez et al., 2023). At the same time, some authors have suggested the need for more social innovation and the co-creation of knowledge online (Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2021), the consideration of the dual role of content consumer/creator ("prosumer") within a framework of accelerated social media growth (Andrade-Vargas et al., 2021), and the nature of student digital practices, which before being educational, were used for entertainment and socialisation (Druetta, 2022).

All of these debates and the existing gaps suggest that the following research question continues to be relevant: how can social media be a better space for the CTE demanded by today's society? Its relevance is more meaningful given the lack of studies contributing to the improvement of initial teacher education. Moreover, as far as we know, no approach exists regarding the intersection of both questions through the Theory of Social Practices (TSP), which simultaneously refers to a reflective experience of CTE in which the social media are a scenario for debate on their possible appropriations as platforms for CTE in the formal teaching-learning space.

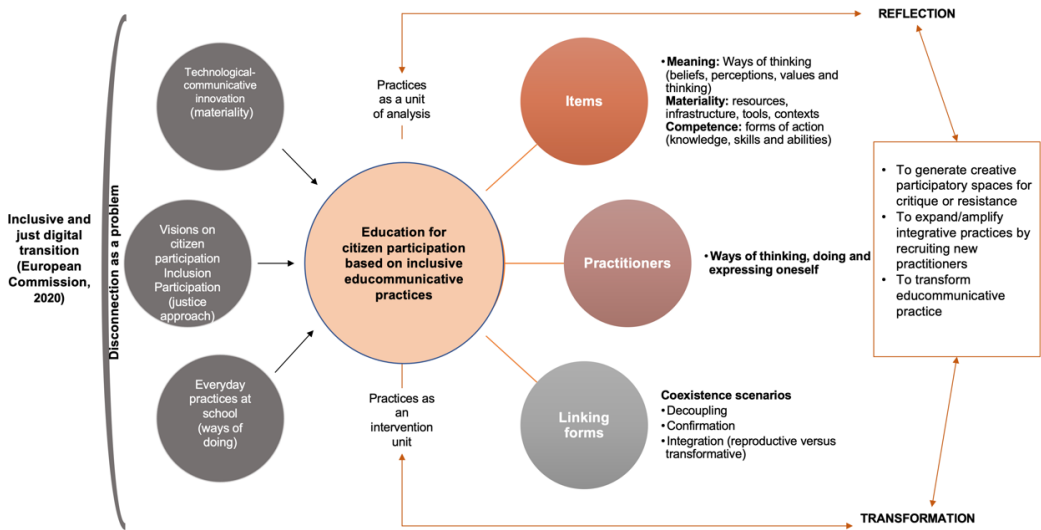
Below, we show this analytical framework based on the TSP, the materials and the method used. The results are presented in the third section and are discussed in the fourth, with conclusions being presented in the fifth.

2. Analytical framework, materials and methods

TSP demonstrates a high explanatory potential for socio-technical changes and social transitions associated with the incorporation of technological innovations (Ariztia, 2017). It arises from the confluence of a heterogeneous set of intellectual traditions that coincide in a pragmatist orientation and a desire to overcome traditional sociological dichotomies to explain the social (e.g., agency and structure). Its origins are discussed in Bourdieu (1972) and Giddens (1984) who used the concept of practice to underline how activity acts as a constitutive aspect of the social world. Other authors defined them as mediated sets of activity, consisting of socially and technically constructed or appropriated practical uses and meanings (Miller, 1998), which may constitute sites and spaces of critique and resistance (De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991). A group of second-generation scholars have adopted a practice-oriented perspective as an effective means of understanding practices in everyday life, identifying three interconnected components in the shaping of behaviour: materiality (infrastructures, equipment and technologies), meaning (beliefs and ideas about actions or practices) and competencies (knowledge, skills and abilities) (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012).

This article analyses the educommunicative practices of CP from the lens of a group of young university students training to become teachers. We examine their appropriations – a notion that articulates uses and associations of meaning, i.e. the objective and subjective dimensions of the process - of SSRs for participation in the formal educational space. The main hypothesis is that these appropriations, in the context of a formal teaching-educational process, are mediated by complex interrelationships between, on the one hand, the uses and associations of meaning that people make of them in informal environments and, on the other hand, the specific features associated with formal teaching-learning spaces. The analytical framework described in Figure 1, allows us to analyse the distinct components of the practices (meanings, materiality and competences), with regard to the implementers (young university population as practitioners) and to reflect on the forms of connection between ways of thinking and doing, mediated by materiality, and the possibility and nature of an integrative and transformative ECP. The description and analysis of these three dimensions - meanings, materiality and competences - are the specific objectives of this research work.

Figure 1. Analytical framework based on the TSP





Source: Own elaboration

In this work, CP is conceived as both an educommunicative experience and a research process.

The study^[1] was conducted by a multidisciplinary teaching and research team made up of five people and involved a total of 134 students in their first and second year of Primary and Early Childhood Education Teacher Training degrees at XXX University. The sample consisted of 80% female and 20% male students aged between 18 and 25. The academic and research experience took place at two different times (the first and second semesters of the 22-23 academic year).

The experience included three distinct phases (Figure 2): 1) A face-to-face workshop combining individual and collective work in groups of approximately 20 people; the workshop was replicated four times in the first semester on 80 students, and twice in the second semester on an additional 54. 2) An online debate regarding the central questions of the study. 3) A creative phase involving both the design and sharing of proposals and an online debate on the challenges of educational institutions as a space for ECP.

Figure 2: Phases of the academic and research experience for data collection

STAGES			
IN-PERSON WORKSHOP (Week 1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is citizen participation? Why is it important to participate? What is my participatory experience? 	ONLINE DEBATE (Week 2-3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do we mean by citizen participation? What role do digital social networks play as tools for participation? Do I use social media to participate? 	CREATIVE GROUP WORK. Design, sharing and online discussion (Week 2-7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design an educommunicative practice to promote citizen participation What are the challenges and opportunities for schools as a space for education for citizen participation using social media? 	FINAL SURVEY online
RESOURCES AND EVALUATION			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory definition of participation (Phillips 66) Participatory biography (Individual participatory spiral) Group participatory spiral. Creative work accompanied by critical reflection: As future teachers, are we prepared to educate in participation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual and/or group contributions to the debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual or group contributions to the debate Creative work suitable for presentation on social media and brief report on its objectives and ideas developed on it Contributions to the final debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual answers to the questionnaire Individual contribution to the evaluation of the participatory experience

Source: Own elaboration

In the initial design, we chose to work with Facebook, a social network which, in addition to having the most users (2958 million) (Statista, 2023a), provides numerous available resources in terms of digital content creation (audio, videos, use of emoticons, etc.), seeking to limit participants' individual creativity as little as possible. For the second temporary moment, we used Instagram, at the suggestion of the students participating in the first experience, and given the participatory nature of the exercise and corresponding with the global trend indicating that the largest percentage of users of this social network consists of young people between 18 and 24 years of age (Statista, 2023b).

In both cases, after the face-to-face and online activities, an *ad hoc* voluntary online (Likert-type) survey was conducted. The questionnaire was answered by 92 individuals aged 18 to 25, who were Early Childhood (52) and Primary (40) education degree students. A large percentage of the respondents were women. No further socio-demographic information was collected from the surveyed population in order to ensure the anonymity of their responses and to encourage greater participation, given the evaluative nature of the survey.

The survey asked about satisfaction with their academic experience, degree and quality of participation in the same, as well as their personal position as relating to social media and the influence of this media on participation, individual use of social media, their potential for CP and, finally, their opinion of the classroom as a space promoting CP. The survey questions were both closed and open response types, and both qualitative and descriptive-quantitative information was provided, allowing for the evaluation of the academic experience.

At a later stage, the various materials collected ^[2] were analysed using a dual qualitative and quantitative-descriptive approach.

The first was based on a critical discourse analysis (CDA), which was theoretically driven by the analytical framework proposed by TSP.

Several studies consider CDA (Fairclough, 1995) to be a relevant method for both the analysis of SSR, since it allows for the articulation of individual, organisational and social issues, and for the study of CP issues where it is required to "make transparent power relations" (McKenna, 2004: 21), "domination, discrimination and control, as manifested in language" (Wodak and Meyer, 2008: 10).

Of the numerous existing discursive approaches, we selected CDA because it provides a relevant analytical framework to uncover opaque relations between discourse and society by examining people's choices of words and metaphors with regard to their relational, experiential and expressive values (Fairclough, 1995); moreover, CDA provides a view of discourses as a social practice (Fairclough, 2003). Franzosi (1998) suggests focusing on the narrative dimension, which provides a better understanding of the meaning construction processes. This proposal transcends the focus on the search for the significant – that is, the search for words that are supposedly more loaded with meaning (such as adjectives) – moving towards the meanings found within the structure and narrative sequences of texts, in what is described as a transition "from variables to actors, from statistical models based on regression to networks, and from a conception of causality based on variables to narrative sequences" (Franzosi, 1998: 527).

In our study, we performed a DCA of the statements expressed as part of the debates held in the social media spaces (furthermore, the answers to the open questions in the survey were also considered). The analysis of both the content and the form of the discourse expressed relied on open and simultaneous coding to include all of the diversity and richness of the content expressed, using three axial variables as a general starting point, which in turn had been the guiding axes of the debates: 1) conceptualisations of CP; 2) appropriations of the social media as a resource for CP; and 3) challenges of the school as a setting for ECP practices. As for the discourse form, the analysis considered both general discourse characteristics (intervention length, discourse formality/informality, argumentation/counter-argumentation resources, interrelationships between interventions, expressions of agreement/disagreement) and the use of resources specific to social networks (use of emojis and interactivity resources such as sharing, "I like", "I love").

The second analytical approach consisted of the quantitative data treatment. For this, a quantitative-descriptive analysis was conducted based on the highest response rates of the 92 respondents, grouping the response options in "agree" or "strongly agree" as possible, and specifically indicating this in the text. No data recoding or transformation was necessary. The following specific coding was applied: 1) relevance and meaning of CP (including questions used to determine the students' degree of satisfaction with the activity, their participation levels, quality and associated competences); 2) the use and meaning of social media (including questions focused on the use of social networks and CP through them), and 3) the vision of the school as a space promoting CP (consisting of a single question having the same purpose). Through these three key elements in the coding, we triangulated the information obtained through qualitative and quantitative techniques to present the results.

3. Results

The TSP analysis of educational-communicative practices of participation through social media in a university context (Figure 1) reveals many interesting aspects. It is impossible to cover all of them in this work, therefore, we will focus on two findings and areas of discussion: components and forms of linkage, which highlight the mediating nature of the formal educational context in participation.

3.1. Participatory educational-communicative practices: meaning, materiality and competence

3.1.1. The meaning of CP or how do students think about participation?

In both face-to-face and online discussions, students demonstrate a complex understanding of the concept of CP, associated with identifying a need, achieving a common goal and contributing to change, all within a framework of voluntary interactions.

Students recognise their responsibility as citizens, specifically as potential teachers, with most of them declaring that they had not previously been concerned about their participation in the public sphere. They emphasised how the experience contributed to increasing their awareness of what is happening in the world and their motivation to "collaborate with their environment"^[3], as well as more clearly perceiving their responsibility with regard to CP, since, as part of the educational process, "we are creating new citizens". In fact, the high degree of student satisfaction in the evaluation of the experience is linked to the social and educational relevance that they recognise in CP (and the innovative and creative nature that SSR incorporate into the educational process).

Participation is also perceived as a characteristic social right, which "implies taking part and being part of society in an active and responsible way". From this approach to rights, the students first reveal the communicative dimension of participation, considering that the right to participate is linked to the open expression of their opinions, as well as the ability to listen to opposing points of view, to the point of being able to rectify them. In line with this, it is linked to the voluntary interaction of people in a given society "seeking to achieve a common goal for the benefit of all its members", with the aim of fostering the transformation of desires into realities. Secondly, they consider CP to be a process that influences the creation and making of decisions in distinct spheres, as "voluntary intervention by citizens in the making of certain public decisions", the responsible and correct action associated with the full exercising of citizenship as it "contributes to an improvement in the quality of life, thereby building full citizenship". Thirdly, their perspective of CP considers the dynamics and structures of social power relations and does not shy away from considering that it is a process in which "it is influenced by superior groups that regulate it".

However, despite these theoretical conceptions, when considering what it means to "participate" in a practical way within the framework of the academic experience itself, a predominantly quantitative vision is evident, in which the quantity of interventions made is (con) fused with the quality of participation, with this prevailing over other qualitative factors that are also mentioned, such as the diversity or novelty of arguments, ethical orientation (values such as respect and equality) and the application of critical thinking.

At the same time, and given the problematising reflections raised in the debates on social media, participation appears to be understood by the student body in a limited way, since it is predominantly conceived as a formal issue, alien to everyday processes and informal spaces. In this sense, the meaning attributed to the informality of social media may mediate the use of social media for CP. Almost one-third of the students (27.17%) believe that social media are too informal to consider "such a serious topic" as civic participation; this group is joined by another 34.74% who also have doubts regarding this.

The last relevant aspect is the conflict detected between the voluntary nature of participation and the perception of the academic experience as compulsory and imposed. The perception of being compulsory has increased participation by the participant group but has led to minimal returns and demotivation.

3.1.2. Materiality: how do students use social media?

It is important to determine whether students visualise the possibility of social media becoming platforms for participation and whether or not their everyday appropriation of them corresponds to these possibilities. In other words, the interpretation of the potential of digital platforms as resources for participation connects their understanding of participation and their actual experience in the use of digital social networks in a complex and even paradoxical way.

Theoretically, both the features of social media (content authorship, bidirectionality, interactivity, connectivity, improved communication channels) and the participatory features of the communicative

dimension of CP processes should enable more horizontal and bidirectional communication. However, some consensus exists in the debates on SSRs when considering their predominant use for leisure and entertainment in free time, sometimes even recognising the passive nature of this personal appropriation. It has been suggested that "young people use them more as a pastime", even acknowledging that "the usual use we make of the networks is quite banal: we use them to send messages to our friends, waste time watching live", such that "we forget their true potential, which is to keep us informed at all times of what is going on around us". Furthermore, a large percentage (44.57%) agree that it is difficult to change this use, and 34.78% of students strongly agree that low participation through social media reflects the general social disinterest in participating.

In the concrete assessment of the experience, 78% believe that they have had many or sufficient opportunities to participate; but, in contrast to these recognised possibilities, a relevant percentage (59%) feel that they have participated little or not at all, as compared to only 29%, who believe that they have participated a lot or quite a lot, and only six highly involved individuals stating that they have tried to involve others more.

Despite the complexities in the relationship between the conditions of possibility and the effective exercising of participation, as well as the predominantly recreational nature noted with regard to the personal use of these digital platforms, a small group of participants display a (pro)positive stance in considering that social networks present facilitating characteristics for CP such as allowing the fast dissemination of information- "thanks to social networks, people can be more informed about what is happening in our world"-, making possible direct communication between people and institutions - "thanks to social networks, people can be more informed about what is happening in our world". This enables direct communication between people or individuals and these institutions"-, which become spaces for debate whereby "within the reach of these digital spaces, people can be more informed about what is happening in our world". This makes direct communication between people and institutions possible so that "the technological characteristics of these digital spaces allow direct communication between people or individuals and these institutions", becoming spaces for debate and putting "within everyone's reach a community and information network where anyone can interact whenever they want" or facilitating/amplifying the mobilisation of people for collective action, since it is stated that "the use of social networks has made it possible in many parts of the world to organise citizens' movements". Therefore, it is declared that "technology has become an ally of citizenship, allowing the expression and defence of different social interests", such that "social networks are a great power that brings with it a great responsibility". In the specific case of academic experience, students mention two other drivers of participation: freedom (temporal and spatial) and the facilitating and motivating role of the teacher.

Along with this (pro)positive stance, another criticism emerges that is associated with the tension between online and offline practices. Here, it is argued that, although these technological platforms are positive with a view to increasing participation, there are better ways to encourage it, such as face-to-face, since "there are interactions necessary to motivate participation that are not carried out through social networks", noting that, although technology can contribute a great deal to socialisation, it is not everything. Thus, it is also questioned whether the greater visibility of the topics provided by the social networks necessarily implies an increase in the individual's degree of participation, since "it is not the same for [the subject] to see as to participate"; the latter is linked precisely to the achievement of a motivational harmony between individuals and the values represented by the publications made on the social networks. In short, when comparing the two materialities (online and offline), there is a clear preference for face-to-face conditions, partly explained by the teacher's facilitation of learning in activities that they perceive to be complex and that require creativity and criticism.

Finally, students believe that the possibility of teamwork and self-organisation has led to inhibition and delegation of tasks to others in the group.

3.1.3 Skills or what do you think about the skills needed to participate in digital environments?

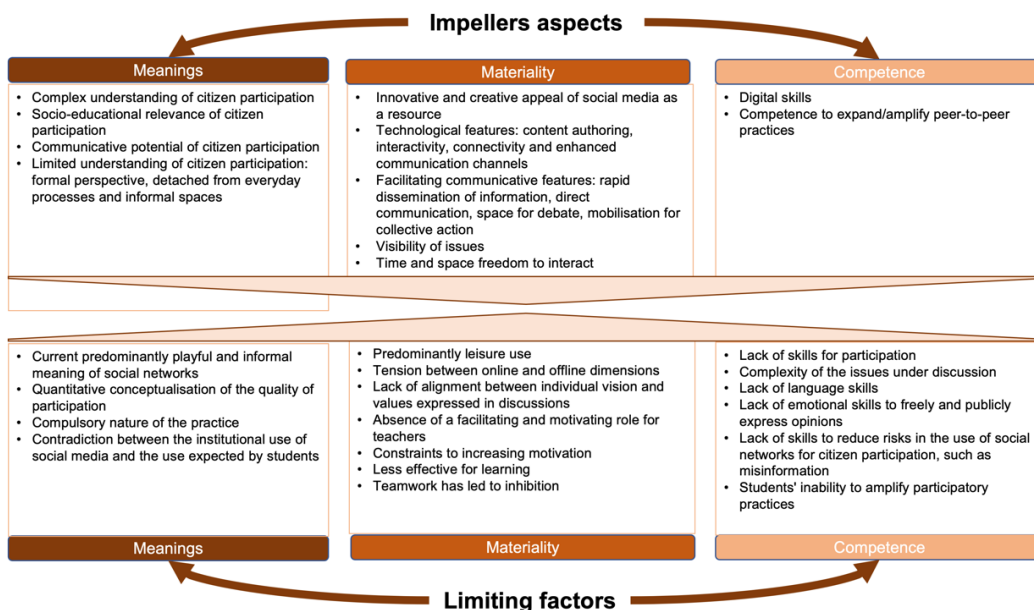
There is a widespread opinion amongst students regarding the dual nature of social media, depending on how they are used: they are "a double-edged sword" or "a tool with which you decide whether to build or break"; in other words, they give users the alternative of becoming "a participatory person who supports social movements, comments and contributes their bit as far as possible", or being a simple observer "with the sole interest of gossiping and reading the latest news for no other purpose". At the same time, they are viewed as a source of immediate information or disinformation that is not exempt from risks such as manipulation, insecurity or privacy, declaring, for example, that there is a tendency when using social media to "settle for the first piece of information with which we form our opinion on a subject, without even checking the sources (it encourages disinformation)", pointing to a critical panorama in which, as a result, "the new generations, (...) live under the over-information of the media"(...) live under over-information (much of it unchecked) because they have everything at a click".

In any case, they understand that having the skills to determine the advantages or dangers of their use contributes to participation. This refers directly to the importance of an adequate communicative education for participation that results in a virtuous appropriation of social media, leading to the issue of the digital divide, which is linked not so much to the access to technologies as to digital literacy. In this sense, not only is there a need for CP processes to remember those who "do not have profiles on social networks", but also to recognise that, although "social networks are a good method for transmitting the culture of citizen participation to the youngest", this is possible "as long as they are accompanied by traditional media and they are properly instructed in their use". In other words, there is an approach to the issue of the digital divide that includes the question of relations between the different media as part of the media ecosystem, as well as the formation of competencies for the correct appropriation of social networks.

The participating students belong to a generation of "digital natives", i.e. they are individuals who have been immersed in the digital technological environment all of their lives (Bennett, Maton and Kervin, 2008), and although this does not necessarily mean that they are digitally competent, in general, they have the necessary technological competences for a creative appropriation of social media. In fact, none of them mentioned having a lack of competence. However, they do recognise their low competence for participation in general (regardless of material conditions). Regarding the academic experience, participation is complex for them; 33.70% of the students say that they do not know how to participate. They find it difficult to offer new arguments in rigid debates that reproduce the ideas learned in the classroom workshop. In fact, they use formal expressions, more characteristic of an educational environment than a social network. Moreover, they verbalise a lack of skills (both linguistic and emotional) to freely and publicly express their opinions. The students' perception that neither classrooms nor social media are "safe" environments to express their opinions is a major limitation when it comes to implementing participatory educommunicative practices.

In short, the analysis of meanings, materiality and competences reveals a number of incentives and constraints to participation (either as citizens or in the academic experience itself), as well as some contradictions between the components of the practices and the people who implement them, which are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Drivers and constraints to participation in educommunicative practices



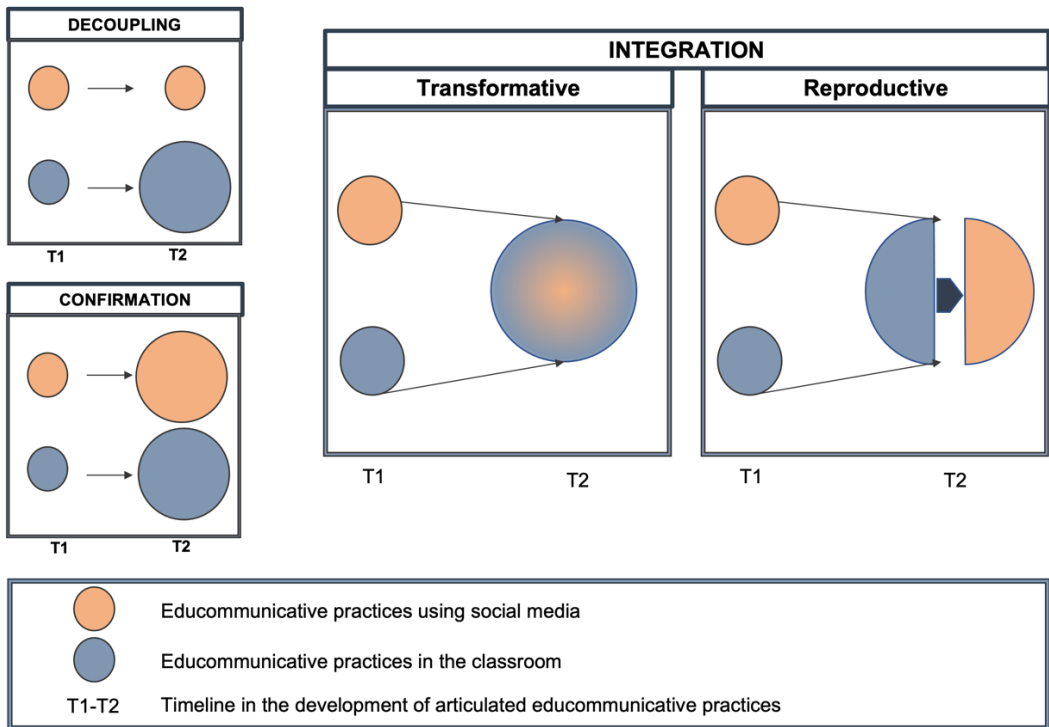
Source: Own elaboration

3.2. Ways of linking educational-communicative practices in ECP in terms of materiality

From the literature reviewed and the experience attained in this research working under two distinct material conditions (classroom and SSR), we have identified three possible scenarios of coexistence or main forms of linking educommunicative practices in ECP, which indicate how they are managed and connected: decoupling (uneven and independent development with predominance of traditional

classroom teaching), confirmation (expansion of practices in a parallel, similar but independent way) or integration (aiming at the harmonisation and integration of the different material conditions) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Scenarios of co-existence of materialities



Source: Own elaboration

In our experience, we have attempted to integrate the two material conditions (integration scenario) in order to further examine the features that the harmonisation claim entails. The results suggest the existence of borders between the two material conditions that make their integration into the educommunicative practices complex, mainly due to the mediation of the educational institution's formal nature. The integrative experience thus becomes an extension of the face-to-face experience and is characterised by the transposition of forms of knowledge and student behaviour used in the traditional face-to-face educational space to the digital context, in which, paradoxically, the social media have been configured more as spaces of silence or reproduction than of criticism, resistance or creativity. Hence, we describe the process as reproductive integration. These issues will be explored in more detail below.

3.2.1. Reproductive integration and the burden of formality

Many of the limiting and mediating aspects of the real integration of social media in the academic experience relate to the excessive weight of formality in the development of internships, which ultimately conditions student participation.

First, a contradiction exists between the students' evaluations of their primarily playful use of the social networks in their daily lives and the ways in which they have appropriated them in the educational-communicative experience. The debates generated in the two social networks (Facebook and Instagram) were long interventions by the participants, characterised by their formality and the almost non-existent use of resources typical of these digital communication spaces associated with the emotional dimension, such as emojis, despite the encouragement of their use by the teachers moderating both spaces. In both cases, although especially in the Facebook group, there was limited interactivity in the use of the possibilities offered by social networks. In the Facebook group, 13 publications were made, with only 15 comments and 11 "Likes", in addition to a video shared as part of one of the comments made. In the account created on Instagram, there were 15 publications, with 79 "Likes" and 55 comments. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the formality and rationality associated with

the institutional educational space, in which the playful dimension is subordinated and even excluded, leads to the reproduction of dominant patterns typical of the educational institution, even in the mostly recreational social media scenario.

Second, the students' ideas regarding the use of social media conflict with the anticipated formality of the participation processes. Thus, they demonstrate greater support of face-to-face debates, to the detriment of online ones, arguing the inadequacy of social media for building an ongoing, "serious", enriching debate that is not subject to misinterpretation.

The third relevant aspect is that evaluation and control have influenced the dynamics of participation, in terms of both quality and quantity. The result is a participatory conception of minimums in strict compliance with the required. Underlying this is a conceptualisation of participation that (con)fuses both dimensions by suggesting that good performance is more closely linked to the number of interventions made as opposed to the form of these interventions, and is conditioned by the fear of being evaluated by teachers (and/or peers). This perception of being evaluated may also result in a reproduction of the discourse of the codes and forms that are linked to a formal teaching-learning practice, the most important objective of which would be the grade to be earned.

Fourth, this mainly formal and rational tendency to use social networks in the proposed debates turns them into a series of disconnected monologues in which participants present their opinions and assessments without interacting with the contributions of the other participants. This tendency is much more pronounced in the case of the group created on Facebook than in the Instagram account, perhaps due to a closer sense of appropriation to this latter social network and greater identification with its users (mostly young people).

Despite the weight of formality in the practices developed, it is significant that this trend has not been critically examined by any of the participants in this experience.

3.2.2. Transformative integration: grooves of creativity and critique

Students who said they were very involved in the dynamics and actively participated in the face-to-face workshops and debates or online tasks, exemplify the most active and creative integration of the different material conditions of the practice in the overall experience. This minority shows a critical positioning with regard to participation and appropriation of the social media. Therefore, educative practice as an ECP resource becomes a critical metacommunicative exercise. As part of this critical stance, the role of the state and the school is questioned, and it is considered that both "should be the main bodies responsible for promoting critical thinking in education so that we are aware of the different forms of citizen participation".

This position is part of a major trend to criticise current institutional uses of social networks as resources for CP, ranging from positions that criticise the shortcomings of these appropriations, stating that "government institutions make little use of these social networks to publicise or encourage behaviour that is beneficial to society", to more radical critiques on the subject, directly claiming that "government bodies do not make proper use of social networks". These opinions should be cautiously interpreted, within the framework of a transcendent understanding of the appropriation of these digital platforms, which associates it with processes of general social transformation, stating that "making the right use of technologies will allow us to start with a change in society". In quantitative terms and specifically referring to the school entity, 34.78% consider that, despite efforts made by the educational institution, today the classrooms are not spaces promoting participation; even so, the student body made few reflections on the limitations of the classroom as an ECP scenario or on how to improve the use of the potential of social media to develop inclusive ECP practices. This is relevant, especially when considering student teachers, who are society's potential educators.

An example of this limited criticism is that only two of the projects presented by the students in phase 3 are directly linked to the dynamics and processes of the formal educational space -classroom or school-. The rest refer to dimensions of social reality external to the educational institution, addressing participation related to recycling, road safety, ecological agriculture, food banks, poverty, discrimination, family, sports, art, community life or the city. This trend suggests, on the one hand, creativity and comprehensiveness in the understanding of ECP, while on the other hand, it may be an expression of certain limitations in the identification of the challenges presented by formal educational spaces as the setting for such a process.

The last criticism is related to the institutional appropriation of these digital platforms, which is more focused on maintaining its reputation by managing its image and external communication than on fostering real feedback or dialogue with others. Here, contradictions are evident between the institutional use of social media and that expected by the student body, leading to scepticism and

demotivation. The sceptical discourse even asks “whether this new form of communication through social media is changing the way in which politics and democracy develop, and whether it is for the better, or whether it is all fiction”.

4. Discussion

In a communicative context where digital media have a broad social impact and social media are increasingly used, we believe that it is relevant to ask whether students view these platforms as a means of participation and whether their daily use is in line with this possibility. In line with other studies, we find a lack of participatory culture (Escobedo, Sales and Traver-Marfí, 2017) as the main limitation for an ECP which, from the outset, is presented to students as a complex and foreign concept.

The visibility of the motivators and constraints of participation in the academic experience leads us to consider whether it is possible to develop transformative integration practices to improve CSE, partially by taking advantage of the great capacity of students to act as recruiters and influence the behaviour of their peers, their competences as digital natives and their majority access to technology in our society. Transformative practices may be located in the three analysed components of educative practice.

a. In the sense and meaning of participation, aligning them with the objectives of the educational-communicative process itself, and integrating formal and informal experiences and the more rational and technological elements with the emotional ones, which together, make up an important part of participation: knowing and wanting to participate.

In the students' debates and projects, CP is linked to diverse and wide-ranging aspects such as knowledge about (and respect for) diversity, solidarity, autonomy, responsibility, dialogue, critical thinking, collaboration, socialisation, civic values, teamwork, cooperation, awareness or the development of creativity. Therefore, aspects related to emotional and rational dimensions are integrated, articulating the feeling, such as solidarity, and the knowledge, such as critical thinking, within these proposals. This approach corresponds to the need identified by previous studies (Macfarlane and Tomlinson, 2017) to include more complex and multidimensional conceptions of participation, democracy and citizenship that are also oriented towards students' commitment to the environment and global responsibility in the curriculum (Fozdar and Martin, 2020).

The field of education has the challenge of preparing students to exercise this citizenship. However, the limited presence of projects in direct dialogue with the participatory transformation of the formal educational space indicates the extent of the challenge that this represents, reaffirming what has been suggested in previous studies (Ainscow, 2015) regarding the complexity of the participatory transformation of curricula.

In the meanings attributed by students to the CP through the networks, certain limitations to integrating digital media into everyday educational-communicative practices in university classrooms are suggested. First, the persistence of the conception of social media as environments for entertainment and socialisation (Druetta, 2022) rather than as platforms for ECP presents a challenge that requires a refocusing of these appropriations. In general, the participants do not reveal a clear visualisation of how to close the gap between a real and an ideal use of such technological resources; this ambivalence may be linked to the unpredictable nature of the impact of social media on socio-educational environments (Andrade-Vargas et al., 2021). Furthermore, the educational institution needs to focus on removing barriers between formal and informal learning processes (Ainscow, et al., 2012) to facilitate the coexistence of educational and recreational uses. Second, fostering relationships with the territory and the commitment to social transformation in a global sense (Sales et al., 2018) is another challenge to contribute to the assumption of responsibility by students and their empowerment.

b. In materiality, i.e. in the use of technological resources and digital social networks, improving the harmonisation of face-to-face and virtual frameworks.

The diverse material conditions in which educational practice unfolds today mediate the educational-communicative process, such that contradictions are generated which undermine its effectiveness. Participation through social media is limited not only by technological aspects but also by the lack of use of these platforms by institutions and the degree of institutionalisation of both the CP (Pano-Yáñez, Pacheco-Lupercio and Sucozhañay-Calle, 2023) and social media.

Furthermore, an important question under debate is whether classroom and social media practices should run parallel but distinct, requiring different processes and skills (Sánchez-Vera, Prendes-Espinosa and Serrano-Sánchez, 2011), or whether they should be integrated by overcoming the barriers of formal and informal learning (Ainscow et al., 2012) inherent to face-to-face and virtual spaces.

Here we are committed to an integrative and transformative approach to overcome neo-determinist conceptions of ICT, which tend to place technologies as a prior, independent and external factor to the socio-historical dimensions (Marí-Sáez, 2014), and to avoid the disconnect between participation in real world and virtual spaces. This approach requires overcoming narrow conceptualisations in the understanding of participation in the classroom and a more fluid transformation of the predominant uses of social media, opening up these digital platforms to improved integration into the dynamics of formal teaching-learning spaces, so that the characteristics of the latter do not ultimately colonise the appropriation of social media by students, as has occurred in our experience.

c. In ways of acting by integrating individual development with collective action through participation.

The recognition of the students' lack of CP-related skills and competences is in line with the limited systematic development of ECP in education systems as noted by some authors (Ainscow, 2015). Even so, the CPD projects proposed by the students highlight two complementary issues that contribute to both personal growth and collective action through practice.

On the one hand, there is an understanding of ECP that highlights the communicative dimension, especially the digital media, as an inherent dimension of participation (Maltos-Tamez, Martínez-Garza and Miranda-Villanueva, 2021). This is evident in proposals for action that involve participatory mechanisms, such as consultations, democratic elections and direct dialogue with decision-makers, and that emphasise the importance of both face-to-face and technologically mediated communication (talks, surveys, peer-to-peer explanation, assemblies, murals, posters, videos, class diaries, or blogs) in the implementation of these projects.

On the other hand, two proposals seek to promote active student participation in the educational institution, through actions in which individual behaviour and collective action are articulated, a perspective that refers to the understanding of educational action as a social practice (Bourdieu, 1972; Giddens, 1984) that would overcome one of the dichotomies (individual/collective) of classical social theories. Both proposals are an expression of an introduction of more complex conceptions of what participation means in the school space, articulating them, on the one hand, with the roles in decision-making processes and, on the other, with the needs of the educational institution (Palacios, Jiménez and Souto, 2015).

5. Conclusions

This academic and research experience is relevant to the field of communication knowledge since it is based on a practical experience of classroom intervention. Focusing on the issue of educommunication with regard to the appropriation of social media and its links with citizen participation processes, we address some of the most innovative elements of the current media ecosystem and simultaneously consider an issue that is also central to contemporary societies, namely training for participation.

From an action-based research approach, the study examines the issue of educommunication from the perspective of future teacher training, thus responding to the need to promote studies which, as part of an effort to integrate this type of training process into formal educational spaces, are aimed at putting into practice educational proposals that encourage the appropriation of social networks - and of ICTs and the media in general - as resources for dialogue and participation.

At the same time, from the perspective of TSP, this article has initiated a necessary debate on the complexity of generating educational scenarios to harmonise the social practices that the different conditions of materiality impose. This approach allows us to see the conflicts arising between the meanings of CP and the uses of SSR, displaying clashes between the formal and informal aspects of practices. The analysis of the experience of CP educommunicative practices has revealed, through the analysis of the discourse of the participating students, that the appropriation of social media as platforms for participation in the formal educational space is mediated by the complex and contradictory interrelationships arising between, on the one hand, the uses and associations of meaning that individuals give them in informal environments and, on the other hand, the specific features associated with formal teaching-learning spaces.

More specifically, the experience has revealed a significant trend to colonise the appropriations of social media occurring in practice by the characteristics of the space in which they occur, in this case, the formal teaching-learning scenario. A marked dichotomy exists between the declaration of a mostly recreational everyday use of social media and their formal and rational use as part of the proposed educational-communicative experience. This has simultaneously led to a contradiction between, on the one hand, the complex and comprehensive meanings generally attributed to the definition of CP and, on the other hand, a simplified and quantitative minimal assessment of the specific individual participation in the CP experience that has been put into practice.

The tension between meanings linked to social media as resources for ECP and the uses of such digital platforms deployed as part of the experience also appears to be associated with other dichotomies linked to the appropriations of ICTs identified by the participants, such as that between the online and offline dimensions, as well as that between individual and institutional appropriations of social media for CP. The different positions regarding these two tensions point to a certain technological positivism that links the social media to the expansion of the conditions of possibility for a greater and more effective CP on the one hand, and on the other hand, to a sceptical discourse on the potential of these digital platforms. This confirms the need to consider these tensions when creating educational-communicative strategies and actions for the CP.

Despite its main limitation - being a case study whose results cannot be generalisable - this research experience suggests the need for further investigation on the possibility of expanding transformative integration practices by taking advantage of the competences and characteristics of the young population (as implementers). Formulas should be sought to eliminate the observed contradictions, focusing on the introduction of innovative curricula and syllabuses based on dialogical, argumentative and digital and cultural literacy competences, focusing not only on digital skills but also on self-regulation of learning and socio-emotional skills.

Finally, as part of the formal educational experience, we suggest the implementation of educommunication processes for participation from a complex, multidimensional and integrating perspective, not limited to the simple incorporation of certain technological tools, but understood as an appropriation of communicative resources, such as ICTs, which articulates their practical uses with the creation of meanings around them to form part of an integral process of meaning construction on the responsible and participatory exercising of citizenship.

6. Contributions

Contributions	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3	Author 4	Author 5
Conceptualisation	X	X			
Content curation	X	X			X
Formal Analysis	X	X	X	X	X
Fundraising	X				
Research	X	X	X	X	X
Methodology	X	X	X	X	X
Project management	X				
Resources	X				
Software					
Supervision	X				
Validation					
Visualisation	X				
Writing: Original draft	X	X	X	X	X
Writing: Review and editing	X	X	X	X	X

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9. Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

10. Responsible declaration for the use of Artificial Intelligence

No Artificial Intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this text.

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Notes

1. The study results from a teaching innovation project supported by University of Zaragoza. The research was carried out with the informed consent of the students.
2. The study data and materials will be made available to any interested researcher upon contacting the referred author. The study was not pre-registered with an analysis plan in a separate institutional register.
3. All sentences in inverted commas are taken verbatim from both online discussions and answers to the open-ended questions in the end-of-experience evaluation survey.