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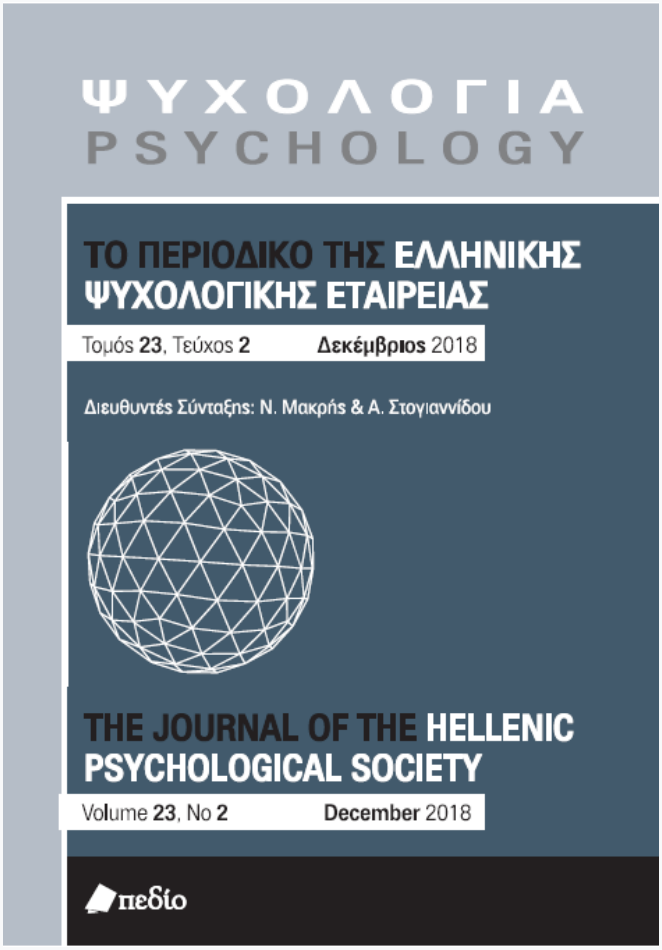

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Social media and political participation: the role of social psychological and social media variables.

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ABSTRACT

Is social media use related to political participation? And how does social media use interact with social psychological variables in predicting political participation? A survey study (N= 238) examined the relationships among social psychological variables (political identification, political self-efficacy), social media variables (social media use, presumed social media influence) and political participation. Results showed that presumed social media influence and social media political use predicted political participation, while general social media use motives (e.g., fun-social, escapism, utilitarian) did not. Political identification and political self-efficacy had both direct and indirect (through social media variables) effects on political participation. A structural equation model provided corroborating evidence to these relationships, suggesting a complementary and mediational function of social media in predicting political participation.

Key words: social media use, political participation, presumed social media influence, social media political use, political identification, political self-efficacy.

Introduction

What is the role of social media to modern political life? Is social media use related to political participation and engagement? How does social media use interact with psychological variables, such as identification and efficacy, in predicting political participation? The present study attempts to provide some answers to these questions based on young people's responses to a survey, within the sociopolitical context of the recent Greek crisis.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that social media can play an important role in the mobilization of people and political behavior. In the 2008 U.S. presidential election, for example, the Obama campaign developed a SNS (my.barackobama.com) and managed to recruit thousands of campaign volunteers willing to assist in many ways with the campaign (Dickinson, 2008). Also, major organizations such as Amnesty International have used social media to coordinate protests in cities around the world (Stirland, 2007). The so-called 'Twitter

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revolutions' in Moldova, Iran, Tunis, and Egypt speak to the importance of social media in people mobilization (Buettner, R. & Buettner, K., 2016). Social media's increasingly significant role in modern political life is generally acknowledged (see Farrell, 2012). The analysis, however, of the complexity of interconnections between social media use and political participation is still a project in progress. A growing body of research suggests that there is a positive relationship between social media use and political participation (Bekkers, Beunders, Edwards, & Moody, 2011; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Pearce & Kendzior, 2012; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012; Yun & Chang, 2011). Social media use has been found, for example, to provide information about mobilization events and to facilitate the coordination of protests and demonstrations (Chadwick & Howard, 2008; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011). While this evidence highlights the importance of social media use to political life, a deeper understanding of the processes that explain this relationship is needed. From a question of whether social media is related to political action, research should turn to the question of how and under what conditions these relationships stand (Valenzuela, 2013). To this aim, the present study examines the role of social media use in predicting political participation within a social psychological framework (e.g., van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). This approach focuses on citizens' social position within a social group and their psychological attachment to it as a significant predictor of political behaviors (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Also, it focuses on individuals' political self-efficacy, that is, the degree to which they feel able to perform a series of political behaviors (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna, & Mebane, 2009), a concept found to predict a number of political behaviors (e.g., Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). By bringing these theoretical concepts into play we expect that our understanding of the relationship between social media use and political participation will be deepened.

Social media and political participation

For some theorists, the relationship between social media and political participation is viewed as essential to political activism, and social media are generally perceived as instrumental to the process of social change (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari, & Mazaid, 2011), although this optimism is not shared by everybody (Gladwell, 2010). Existing evidence suggests that social media use is connected with political participation and collective action (e.g., Bekkers, et al., 2011; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Valenzuela et al., 2012). Social media can facilitate mobilization by providing motivating information to the interested individuals, help organization of collective actions (e.g., a protest) and, most importantly, enable the political deliberation among individuals with an interest in political process (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Chadwick & Howard, 2008; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011).

The latter function of social media, that is, their ability to bring citizens together to communicate and share views and opinions on important issues, is accomplished by facilitating access to a considerable number of contacts, thereby creating the opportunity for social movements to reach a critical mass (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Also, Papacharissi (2010) points to the ability of social media to help the construction of collective identity by enabling positive peer interaction and commitment to group norms (see also Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Attachment to collective identity has been found to predict collective action (see van Zomeren, et al., 2008). Relevant is the finding that, social media (especially Facebook) have been found to maintain and solidify offline relationships (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), and help the development of trusting relationships (Kobayashi, Ikeda, & Miyata, 2006).

Another important function of social media that facilitate political participation is their ability to keep users continuously up to date about

the information uploaded by their contacts. For example, individuals are informed about news or commentary uploaded and produced by the political groups and collectives they may belong to (e.g., Valenzuela et al. 2009), or they may just be interested in keeping up with the news on topics they care about. This way their information needs are satisfied and collective action is promoted (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012) make the interesting point that information shared through social media is distinct to information provided through other informational venues because the former is filtered and processed by individuals users trust and rely upon. The importance and relevance of information is evaluated by other like-minded group members and, hence, the information acquired through social media is characterized by its inherent interactivity and can be readily employed as frame to understand and evaluate surrounding social reality.

Presumed social media influence

Another important to the present study concept is that of presumed social media influence. It is based on the idea that citizens are using social media not only because they themselves are feeling capable of bringing some kind of social change by performing a number of political actions, but also, because they believe that by using social media some change is possible and that these media are capable of influencing people's political thinking, behavior and motives. This notion is based on people's perceptions of media effectiveness (see McQuail, 2010). People try to understand media effects and develop more or less organized implicit theories about media effectiveness and consequently base their behavior on these perceptions. These perceptual processes and their behavioral consequences have been extensively examined in the literature of presumed media influence (Gunther & Storey, 2003; for a review see Tal Or, Tsfati, & Gunther, 2009). What is often examined in this research is the comparison between perceived media influence on other recipients (third person perception) and the self (first person perception) and what is often found is the self to be perceived as less influenced than the others. A central idea of this research, and an important one to the present study, is the hypothesis that people often act based on their perceptions of whether media can exert significant influence on media audience (e.g., Hoffner & Buchanan 2002; Tewksbury, Moy, & Weis 2004). If people think that media content can indeed have an impact on communication recipients, this also facilitates actual media influence on themselves. In the present study we take a more global perspective to the hypothesis of presumed influence and we examine perceived (social) media influence, not only on other recipients, but also on participants themselves, in order to estimate the total perception of influence on all recipients (the self included). This way, the focus is not on the potential differences between perceived influence on others and self, and thus on comparative perceptions, but on a general schema of social media effectiveness. We expect that such an approach can more fully capture people's implicit theories of the power of social media.

Social media use motives

Researchers have used *uses and gratification theory* (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973) as a theoretical framework to understand how individuals are using social media in order to satisfy their goals (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). Individuals develop different kinds of expectations about the satisfaction they will get, depending on the different kinds of media they use. For example, various motives have been proposed that underlie general Facebook use, e.g., pass time, escapism, relaxing, social interaction, meeting new peo-

ple etc. (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). In the present study we will examine the general uses of social media, but also focus on the political use of social media. Individuals are using the social media because they expect to gratify political informational and political relational needs, they search for information related to political issues and they interact with other fellow members of the political groups they may belong to. Therefore, in order to better predict political participation is important to examine the general *and* political uses and gratification sought by social media use.

Socio-psychological predictors of collective action

The aim of the present study is to examine how social media variables (such as use motives, and presumed influence) are related to psychological variables (such as political identification and political efficacy) and how they all predict political participation and collective action. Research in social psychology of collective action has examined the reasons why people undertake collective action in order to improve their life conditions (Klandermans & Roggeband, 2007). In doing so, researchers focus mainly on people's subjective interpretations of their situation as the motivating variables underlying political action. Wright, Taylor and Moghaddam (1990) define collective action as when "a group member engages in collective action anytime that he or she is acting as a representative of the group and where the action is directed at improving the conditions of the group as a whole" (p. 995). Broadly defined then, collective action can be seen as any behavior aiming at removing the perceived causes of the group disadvantages. This may include a wide-ranging pool of behaviors such as, working for election campaigns, donating money for political reasons, protesting, participating in demonstrations, or boycotting products for political reasons. Political participation within this framework is any action that aims to influence government action and policymaking (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

It is important to note that, often, studies predicting collective action focus mainly on the intention to follow a specific behavior rather than the behavior itself (for an exception see De Weerd & Klandermans, 1999). It is assumed that intention to act mediate the relationship between attitudes towards action and the actual behavior (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Within social psychological theorizing of collective action and political participation two major explanatory concepts have been proposed: perceived efficacy and social identity (for a theoretical integration of these concepts, together with relative deprivation, see van Zomeren et al., 2008). Self-efficacy, a well researched concept in psychological research, is based on people's beliefs that they are capable to produce given attainments, on various domains of functioning, including learning, work, sport and health etc. (Bandura, 1997, 2001). Self-efficacy beliefs are important because, unless people feel they can attain desired outcomes, they have little motivation to pursue their goals and to deal with difficulties. In the realm of political life, perception of efficacy is the degree to which people believe and expect that their actions could be effective in the political arena and in attaining collective goals in general (Caprara et al., 2009). Although the concept has been initially conceived in terms of an individualistic perspective of value and expectancy (see Klandermans, 1984), it has been also developed to a concept at a group level (i.e., collective efficacy, see Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999). However, although collective efficacy is functioning at group level, it cannot be based on feelings of individual inefficacy (Fernandez-Ballesteros, Diez-Nicolas, Capr-

ara, & Bandura, 2002). Research evidence suggests that political efficacy is connected to the promotion of both conventional and non-conventional forms of political participation (Kenski, 2004; Madsen, 1987; Morrell, 2003), several indicators of civic engagement (e.g., voluntary work for nonpolitical groups, raising money for charity, Gil de Zúñiga, et al. 2012), and interest in politics (Cohen, Vigoda & Samorly, 2001).

Social identity is another concept employed to predict political participation and collective action. Social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has provided a useful framework to understand how belonging to social groups defines and evaluates individual identity. SIT proposes that people join social groups in order to attain a positive social identity that reflects to their self-evaluation. However, not all social group memberships are positively valued. Therefore, members of a disadvantaged group who strive for positive social identity they get involved in social competition with outgoups in order to change the intergroup status differential to their group's benefit. The greater the identification with the group, the more likely group members will resume collective actions toward social change (see Drury & Reicher, 2005). When political self-definition increases, the norm of political participation becomes salient; the more one identifies with their political identity, the more weight the norm of political participation will carry and the more it will result in an 'inner obligation' to participate on behalf of their political group (Klandermans, 1997). Political identification intensifies feelings of efficacy (Simon, et al., 1998) and it has been found meta-analytically to be a very important predictor of collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Finally, participants' ideological self-positioning is also examined in the present study as a predictor of collective action. Previous research has shown that left-right ideology is related with political participation, with citizens at the left end of the ideological spectrum supporting collective actions at a greater degree (Muller, 1979).

Present study

The aim of the present study is to examine the social media and psychological variables predicting political participation in the context of an economic and sociopolitical crisis. Previous research has shown that social media use is related to political participation (e.g., Bekkers et al., 2011; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Pearce & Kendzior, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2012; Yun & Chang, 2011). We make the assumption that among the various motives underlying social media use, political motives (i.e., to gratify political informational and political relational needs) will be related with political participation (H1). The more one uses social media to keep informed about political issues or keep in touch with other fellow members of political groups, the more they will report intention for political participation. Also, we assume that the more participants believe that social media can bring some kind of change on people's political thinking, behavior and motivations (the presumed social media influence, Gunther & Storey, 2003), the more they will use social media for political reasons (H2), and the more they will be inclined to report intention of political participation (H3).

Based on the relative socio-psychological theorizing (see van Zomeren et al. 2008) we assume that political identification will be a strong predictor of political participation (H4) but also of political self-efficacy (H5, Simon et al., 1998). Political self-efficacy is also expected to predict political participation (H6, Caprara et al., 2009).

Concerning the relationships among social media and psychological variables we assume that social media will have a supplementary role, so that presumed social media influence (H7) and social media's political use

(H8) will mediate the effects of psychological variables on political participation. According to this perspective social media facilitate the political engagement of politically active and committed people (Wellman, Hasse, Witte, & Hampton, 2001), by providing additional communication outlets and participation opportunities that do not exist off line (Vitak et al., 2010). Also, according to Papacharissi (2010), social media use facilitates the expression of identity (in this case political identity) in order to achieve outcomes at a collective level (e.g., group cohesion). Finally, social media political expression (a proxy to the present study's social media political use) has been examined as a mediator to political participation in the literature (see, for example, Gil de Zúñiga, Moleyneux, & Zheng, 2014).

Method

(i) Participants

A total of 244 students of a Greek University participated in the study. From this initial sample six participants were excluded because they had a large amount of missing data. Age ranged from 18 to 42 years (M = 24.82, $S.D.$ = 6.47) with 129 male and 109 female participants.

Measures

Motives for social media use. A twelve-item scale was created, based on previous research (Bumgarner, 2007; Foregger, 2008; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Smock et al., 2011), to measure participants' motives for using social media. Participants reported (on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) the reasons why they use social media. A principal axis factoring (with promax rotation) was performed on the scale revealing four factors, a) a *political* use factor (eigenvalue of 3.36, 28% of variance, all loadings > .7, Cronbach's alpha= .882), with four items (*I use social media, "...to search for information relating to political ideologies and views", "...to search for information relating to political parties, movements, and organizations", "...to participate in discussions with political content", "...to keep in touch with members of political groups which I belong, or feel close, to"),* b) a *fun-social* use factor (eigenvalue of 2.53, 21% of variance, all loadings > .5, Cronbach's alpha= .671), with four items (*I use social media "...because it relaxes me", "...because it is fun", "...to keep in touch with my friends", "...to meet new people")*, c) an *escapism* factor (eigenvalue of 1.32, 11% of variance, all loadings > .5, Pearson's r= . 34), with two items (*I use social media "...to pass time when I'm bored", "...because I don't have anything else to do")*, and d) a *utilitarian* factor (eigenvalue of 1.08, 9% of variance, all loadings > .5, Pearson's r= .48), with two items (*I use social media "..to find information about music and my hobbies", "...to find information about games, programming etc.")*.

Presumed social media influence. A six-item scale was created to measure perceived effectiveness of social media on political motives, thinking, and behaviours. Participants were asked to estimate the degree to which they think that social media can affect the political motives, political thinking, and political behaviour of themselves and of other people accordingly, using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all)* to 7 (*very much so*). A composite measure was created by averaging the six items (Cronbach's alpha = .831).

Social media use intensity. Participants were asked to report a) how often they use social media (on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *rarely* to 5 = *every day*), and b) how much time they spend every time they connect to social media (on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 = *1-10 minutes* to 6 = *more than three hours)*. A composite measure of social media use was created by multiplying frequency of

use by time spent while using social media (Smock et al., 2011).

Left-right political orientation. Participants positioned themselves politically on a left-right scale (1 = *extreme left* to 7 = *extreme right*).

Political self-efficacy. The short version of the political self-efficacy scale by Caprara et al. (2009) was employed in this study. Participants reported (on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) the degree to which they feel able to perform ten political behaviours (sample items are: "*I feel confident that I would be able to express my political views even in opposite political contexts", "I feel confident that I would be able to actively promote the election of political candidates that I trust", "I feel confident that I would be able to use the means that are at my disposal as a citizen to control the actions of politicians",* Cronbach's alpha = .911).

Political identification. A measure of four items was employed: participants indicated (a) the importance of their political beliefs, (b) their commitment to their political ideology, (c) the degree of interest in politics, and (d) the degree of their political activity (adapted from Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1995; Duck, Terry, & Hogg, 1998). All responses were given on 7-point scales with higher numbers indicating stronger political identification. In order to obtain a single measure of strength of politicized identification all four items (importance of political beliefs, commitment to political ideology, degree of interest in politics, and the degree of their political activity) were subjected to a principal components analysis. All items loaded on one factor (eigenvalue = 3.11, 78% of variance, all loadings > .8) and a composite variable was created (Cronbach's alpha= .905).

Political participation. Participants reported how often (from 1 = *not often at all* to 7 = *very often*) they perform a number of political behaviors (adapted from Caprara et al., 2009)*: participate in a protest, contact members of the parliament or city council, donate money to political organization or parties, promote the election of political candidates, participate in political discussions, hand out political leaflets, help in organized political events, relate with political representatives, sign a petition.* All items loaded on one factor (eigenvalue = 5.01, 56% of variance, all loadings > .6) and a composite variable was created (Cronbach's alpha= .894).

Results

Means and standard deviations of all variables and intercorrellations of all variables are shown in Table 1.

General overview

Results show that participants are using social media more than three times a week and for, at least, an hour when they connect on to them. In order to better capture participants' social media use a new variable (social media use intensity) was created by multiplying frequency of use by time spent on social media (Smock et al., 2011).

Participants report a moderate degree of political identification, a small to moderate degree of political self-efficacy, a center-left political leaning, a small degree of political participation, and they also think that social media are capable of affecting citizens' (theirs and others) political thinking and behavior in a small to moderate degree.

Repeated measures on the four social media motives showed that a) both the fun-social use and the utilitarian use (no difference between them) were significantly reported more often than the escapism use [*Fs*(1, 237) = 27.53 and 5.76, effects sizes: η^2 = .11 and η^2 = .03 accordingly, both *ps* < .02] and b) political use was significantly reported less often as compared to all of the rest of motives [*Fs* between 187,21 and 48,21, effects sizes: η^2between .44 and .17, all *ps* < .001]. All motives were positively correlated, except the political use and the escapism use, which were not.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Social media use												
1. Social media frequency	4,52	,98										
2. Social media time spent	3,39	1,60	**,30****									
3. Presumed social media influence	3,42	1,06	**,13***	**,20****								
Social media Motives												
4. Political Social media use	2,44	1,54	**,13***	**,16***	**,50****							
5. Fun-social social media use	3,96	1,11	**,44****	**,29****	**,33****	**,19****						
6. Utilitarian social media use	3,76	1.65	**,13****	**,23****	**,16***	**,18****	**,28****					
7. Escapism social media use	3,44	1,47	**,19****	**,19****	,03	-,11	**,34****	**,15***				
Political variables												
8. Political identification	4,27	1,58	-,01	-,05	**,26****	**,56****	,01	,03	**-,13***			
9. Political efficacy	3,10	1,26	-,06	,02	**,26****	**,50****	,05	-,06	-,01	**,52***		
10. Political ideology	3,63	1,34	**,27****	,02	,02	-,03	**,21****	-,07	-,04	-,09	**-,15***	
11. Political Participation	2,29	1,19	-,02	-,04	**,27****	**,57****	-,01	-,03	-,10	**,65****	**,66****	-,09

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note. All variables measured on 7-point scales, except: **Social media frequency**= 5-point scale (1 = *rarely* to 5 = *every day*) and **Social media time spent**= 6-point scale (1 = *1-10 min* to 6 = *more than 3 hours)*.

Hierarchical regressions of political participation

In order to examine the variables predicting political participation a series of hierarchical regressions were performed on political participation (see Table 2). The variables were entered as follows: in the first block, demographics (age and sex) and social media use intensity were entered and significantly

predicted political participation (R = 0.26, R^2= 0.07, $F(3, 216) = 5.03$, $p < 0.001$). In the second block, all politically relevant variables were entered (political identification, political efficacy, and political ideology), significantly predicting political participation (R = 0.77, R^2= 0.59, $F(6, 216) = 50.32$, $p < 0.001$). In the third block, social media variables were entered (political use and presumed social media influence), also significantly predicting political participation (R = 0.78, R^2= 0.61, $F(8, 216) = 41.22$, $p < 0.001$).

Age was positively related to active political participation, so that older participants were more likely to perform the political participation behaviors (β= .20, $p < .01$). Sex was also marginally correlated to active participation, with men being more likely to actively participate in the political process (β= -.12, $p = .07$, female coded with higher number). When the second block of variables was entered, it was found that political identification and political self-efficacy were positively, as expected, related to active participation. So, the more participants reported that they feel identified to their political identity (β= .40, $p < .001$) and capable of performing a series of political actions (β= .44, $p < .001$), the more they were actively participating in the political process. When the third block was entered with the variables related to political use of social media, it was found that the more participants were using social media for political reasons (β= .22, $p < .001$), the more they

Table 2
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Political Participation (N = 238)

	Political participation	
Variable	B	t
Step 1		
Age	**.20**	**2.96****
Sex	**-.12**	**-1.83#**
Social media use intensity	-.04	-.68
Step 2		
Political identification	**.40**	**7.40*****
Political efficacy	**.44**	**8.43*****
Political ideology	-.01	-.09
Step 3		
Political social media use	**.22**	**3.53*****
Presumed social media influence	-.05	-1.00

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; # p = .07
Note.
For **Political participation**: R^2=.05 ($p<.01$.) for Step 1; **Δ**R^2 = .52 ($p<.001$) for Step 2.**Δ**R^2 = .02 ($p<.001$) for Step 3.

actively participated in politics. Both the introduction of second and third block of variables significantly increased the degree of variance explained compared to the first block, providing evidence of the importance of these variables (see Table 2). Interestingly, the social media political use predicted political participation over and above the important variables of political identification and political efficacy.

Structural equation model of political participation.

To more stringently examine the relationships of all variables of interest as a structure, a model was tested where political media use partially mediate the effects of political identification and political self-efficacy on political participation (see Figure 1). Also, the mediational effect of presumed social media influence was included in the model. The hypothesized model was specified with AMOS 21 software. The goodness of fit of the model to the raw data was evaluated with several fit indices. A non-significant chi-square was expected in order for the model not to be rejected. Additional goodness of fit indices were employed to test the comparative fit of the hypothesized model, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Nonnormed Fit Index (NNFI), with values ranging from 0 to 1.00. It is desirable for both indices to have values greater than .90 indicating a better fit to the empirical data. Also, a badness of fit index was employed, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which is a residual based index with desirable values of .08 and less that indicate good fit of the model (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002).

The analysis showed that the hypothesized model fit the data very well χ^2 (df=1, N=238) = .11, p = .734. The goodness of fit indices provided good fit CFI = 1.000 and NNFI = 1.000. The RMSEA index = .000 (90% CI:

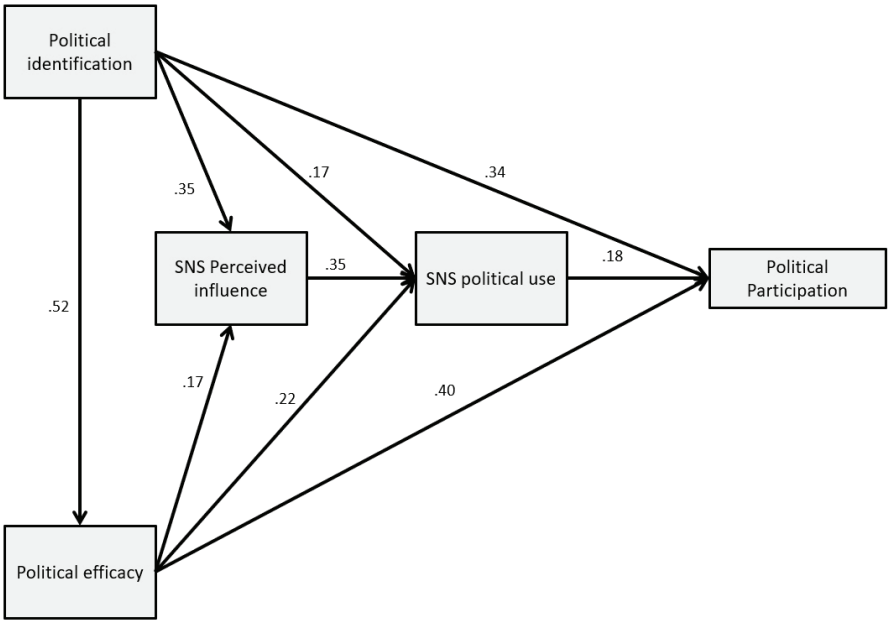

Figure 1. SEM model of psychological variables, social media variables and political participation

.000–.121) also provided a good fit. Inspection of the model reveals that all paths were significant. Increased political identification (β= .35, p < .001) and political self-efficacy (β= .39, p < .001) were directly related with increased political participation. Also, increased political identification (β= .18, p < .02) and political self-efficacy (β= .17, p < .02) were related with increased perceived social media political efficacy and social media political use (β= .35, p < .001 and β= .22, p < .001, accordingly). Increased perceived social media political efficacy (β= .35, p < .001) was also related to increased social media political use. Increased social media political use (β= .18, p < .001) was also related to increased political participation.

The results suggest that social media variables play a (meditational) role in predicting the effects of political identification and self-efficacy on political participation.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among psychological variables (political identification, political self-efficacy), social media variables (social media use motives, presumed social media influence) and political participation. Two distinct strands of theorizing have been brought together in order to illuminate these relationships: one deriving from social psychological theorizing of collective action and political participation and another from research on social media use in the realm of politics. Overall, results confirm that psychological variables have direct, and indirect, through social media use, effects on political participation. Social media use has been shown to be an important variable in predicting political participation in a context where individuals are committed to their political identity and feel capable of performing a number of political behaviors that will bring some kind of political effects. Therefore, a perspective of complementary and mediational function of social media in predicting political participation has been revealed. Overall, all hypotheses were confirmed by the analyses.

Generally, the present study confirmed earlier findings that social media use is related to political participation (Bekkers et al., 2011; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Pearce & Kendzior, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2012; Yun & Chang, 2011). Social media promote the dissemination of mobilizing information, assist with the organization and coordination of collective actions and also provide the means for political discussion and exchange of views among interested individuals (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Chadwick & Howard, 2008; Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011).

Although there is an increasing body of research examining the motives underlying social media use (see Smock et al., 2011), there had been less research attention devoted to social media use for political reasons. The present study showed that the political motive is an important predictor of political participation. Also, the political motive mediated the effects of political identification and political efficacy on political participation. This evidence provides support to the hypothesis that social media perform a supplementary function (Wellman et al., 2001; Vitak et al., 2010), by providing additional communication outlets and facilitating and amplifying participation opportunities. Moreover, politically motivated use of social media was found to predict political participation over and above the effects of political identification and political self-efficacy, signifying the importance of social media use for political participation and engagement.

Another important social media variable that was revealed in this study was that of presumed social media influence. While the significant role of perceived media influence has been shown in a number of studies and contexts (see for example Gunther, Bolt, Borzekowski, Liebhart, & Dillard, 2006; Co-

hen, Tsfati, & Sheafer, 2008), the notion of the presumed social media influence is introduced for the first time in the relative literature. Participants' perception of the potential influence that social media may exert on citizens' political thinking, behaviors and motivations (on both themselves and others) was found to be positively related to political participation and to significantly predict, in the structural equation model, the motivation to use social media for political reasons. Interestingly, it seems that the political motive fully mediate the effect of presumed social media influence on political participation: the positive relationship of the presumed social media influence and political participation is diminished when political use is included in the (hierarchical) regression, something also evident in the structural equation model. It was also found that presumed social media influence was dependent on both political identification and self-efficacy.

Findings also confirm the expected positive relationships between political identification and political participation and between political self-efficacy and political participation. Much of the variance of political participation is explained by political identification and self-efficacy. These two variables have been found in a number of studies to predict political participation (Caprara et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al. 2008). The more committed citizens are to their political ideology, the more likely they are to engage in political behaviors that promote the interests of their social group. Also political identification directly predicted political self-efficacy (Simon et al., 1998), the more participants feel committed to their political identification the more able they feel to perform a number of political behaviors expecting to bring a desired political outcome. And, of course, the more able they feel to perform these behaviors, the more likely they are to engage in political participation of some kind. Interestingly, participants' self-positioning on the left-right ideology did not predict political participation. Perhaps, the context of the economic crisis storming Greece leveled intention to political participation to a similar degree among participants from all positions of political spectrum. Or, alternatively, different kinds of political participation may be correlated with the opposing ideological poles of the political spectrum something that cannot be tested in the present study with the global measure of political participation. Of course both explanations are speculative since there is no empirical evidence to support them.

Demographic characteristics were proved relevant to the present study so that older participants and men were more likely to report intention to engage to political participation. The older participants are, the more committed they must feel to their ideology and the more able they feel to perform various political behaviors. Also, there is evidence that men tend to be more engaged in political affairs than women (while women are equally active in community activities), which is explained in terms of differences in socialization (women learn early in their lives that politics is less relevant to them), education attainment, and access to the labor market (with respect to education, income and occupational status women are, on average, disadvantaged compared to men; see Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001; Enns, Malinick, & Mathews, 2008).

Limitations of the present study concern the non-representative character of the sample something that restrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research should provide confirming evidence by employing representative samples. Also, data are cross-sectional and, therefore, claims about causality are not possible. On a theoretical issue, the importance of self-efficacy notwithstanding, social psychological research has shown that collective efficacy is also an important predictor for collective action, and future research should search for the interplay between collective and self-efficacy in predicting political participation in the context of social media

use. For example, one could examine whether social media use empowers perceived efficacy more at the individual level, than at the collective level, depending on the kind of preferred social media use (e.g., retrieval of political information by the individual vs. communication with others in order to coordinate political action). Despite the limitations of the present study, these findings contribute to our understanding of the role of social media use in political engagement: first, the importance of politically motivated use of social media has been found significant over and above the variables of political identification and self-efficacy. Second, the presumed social media influence has been revealed as an important predictor of political engagement. Third, social media variables (presumed influence and political use) play an important role in mediating the effects of political identification and efficacy on political participation.

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Μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και πολιτική συμμετοχή: Ο ρόλος των κοινωνικοψυχολογικών και μηντιακών μεταβλητών

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Συνδέεται η χρήση των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης (ΜΚΔ) με την πολιτική συμμετοχή; Πώς η χρήση των ΜΚΔ αλληλεπιδρά με τις κοινωνικοψυχολογικές μεταβλητές στην πρόβλεψη της πολιτικής συμμετοχής; Σε μία μελέτη επισκόπησης (N= 238) εξετάσαμε τις σχέσεις μεταξύ κοινωνικοψυχολογικών μεταβλητών (πολιτική ταύτιση, πολιτική αυτεπάρκεια), μεταβλητών των ΜΚΔ (χρήση των ΜΚΔ, προσλαμβανόμενη επιρροή των ΜΚΔ), και της πολιτικής συμμετοχής. Τα αποτελέσματα έδειξαν ότι η προσλαμβανόμενη επιρροή των ΜΚΔ και η πολιτική χρήση των ΜΚΔ προέβλεψαν την πολιτική συμμετοχή, ενώ τα γενικά κίνητρα της χρήσης των ΜΚΔ (π.χ., διασκέδαση, απόδραση, χρηστικότητα) δεν την προέβλεψαν. Η πολιτική ταύτιση και η πολιτική αυτεπάρκεια είχαν άμεσες και έμμεσες επιδράσεις (μέσω των μεταβλητών των ΜΚΔ) στην πολιτική συμμετοχή. Ένα μοντέλο δομικών εξισώσεων επιβεβαίωσαν αυτές τις σχέσεις, υποδεικνύοντας μια συμπληρωματική και διαμεσολαβητική σχέση της χρήσης των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης στην πρόβλεψη της πολιτικής συμμετοχής.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: χρήση των ΜΚΔ, πολιτική συμμετοχή, προσλαμβανόμενη επιρροή των ΜΚΔ, πολιτική χρήση των ΜΚΔ, πολιτική ταύτιση, πολιτική αυτεπάρκεια.

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