Citizen Participation, Social Media Use, and the Shift in Political Trust: Results from a European Survey

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The most common measures whether democratic citizenship is in decline have been voter turnout, membership in political and societal organizations, and trust in the leading political and social institutions such as the government, the parliament, the Supreme Court, or the military (Schudson, 1998; Putnam, 2000). All these three indicators are prominent issues in public discourse when it comes to discussing what is often called a growing “democratic deficit” (Seidle, 2004) or even a “crisis of democracy” (Zittel & Fuchs, 2007). It is commonly accepted that the only way to take steps against this crisis is to increase the level of political participation, thus revealing a particular relationship between the aforementioned three indicators in that institutional trust appears as a prerequisite of the other two indicators, voter turnout and membership in political and societal organizations, which both can be regarded as measures of political participation – at least in a traditional sense.

Therefore, it is not surprising that besides suggestions to reform the institutions of democracy in order to get people more involved in politics there is growing demand throughout the Western world that the forms of liberal-representative democracy have to be expanded to include participatory approaches that aim at empowering as many citizens as possible to raise their voice and to take part in the “common work” of keeping an eye on social problems, heading them off or introducing them into the political process. While some scholars take a more skeptical stance arguing that representative democracy as commonly enshrined in the constitution of most democracies does not allow the implementation of approaches aiming at comprehensive mass participation (Fuchs, 2007), others recognize the critical role voluntary civic participation play in helping promote active citizenship, thus representing a first necessary step to ensure acceptance and functioning of the democratic system (Zukin et al., 1996; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).
In any case, there is widespread agreement that the contemporary erosion of political participation depends to a certain degree on the growing use of digital communication technologies – as political participation was always triggered by changes to media communication forms (Norris, 2000). However, opinions are as divided with regard to the impact social media might have on political participation, as they are with regard to the impact participatory approaches might exert on democratic processes. While the more skeptical view expects an exacerbation of the trend toward increasing political apathy and declining voter turnout, as the displacement thesis would suggest (Putnam, 2000), more optimistic assumptions (usually associated with the mobilization thesis) point toward the fostering of political engagement through the use of online social networks. For example, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela (2012), Kim, Hsu and Gil de Zúñiga (2013), and Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland and Bimber (2014) have shown that, under certain preconditions, use of the Internet or social media can have a positive impact on social capital and political participation, and, on an interpersonal level, on inclusion in a heterogeneous range of debates. To shed light on these contradictory assessments of the political consequences of social media use, we suggest taking a closer look at the role social media use might play with regard to the various forms of political participation, how it differs from that of the use of traditional mass media, and, how it is linked to institutional trust as a major prerequisite of participation.

**From “Collective” to “Connective” Action**

More recent theoretical considerations point to an ongoing process of societal change in which established ideas about politics, participation, and the role media plays in society are superseded (Highfield, 2016; Loader et al., 2014). For example, Bennett and Segerberg’s (2013) “logic of connective action” approach draws, on the one hand, on the rapidly changing notions of democracy, but conceptualizes them in accordance with the nature of digitally
mediated social action, and in contrast with the traditional dynamics of organization-centered and brokered “collective action” (as formulated by Olson in 1965) with its emphasis on voting and party membership (see Table 1). From this point of view, “public connections” (Couldry & Markham, 2006), arising in trustworthy media-based interactions, are assumed to replace former notions of the importance of groups and group coercion for achieving the common good, and to contribute to the development of shared, issue-based objectives and the willingness to take an interest in them.

The different logics of these two dynamics are based on a changed concept of political participation. The connective dynamic implies a fundamental move away from the established representative system, along with its group-based identities and interests and its institutionalized forms of participation, toward more individualized, informal, and spontaneous forms of participation. The latter are intrinsically motivated by autonomously formulated concerns and aspirations, which correspond to personal ideas about what constitutes a “good life”, and are flexibly aimed at various actors not only in the political sphere, but also in the economic sphere (Ward, 2014): “Taking public action or contributing to a common good becomes an act of personal expression.” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 752) This change has its origins in increasing individualization with its rise of self-expression values, which weakens pressures for group conformity (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), but also in dissatisfaction with the current status of democratic government and a loss of trust in the established political institutions (Patterson, 2002; Dahlgren, 2009; Perednea et al., 2012).

Just as traditional mass media corresponds to “collective” behavior in that it acts as a communication agent that provides the information citizens need to make political decisions, the structural features characteristic of social network services (SNS) make them an ideal platform for implementing the specific logic of connective action. They offer individuals the opportunity to autonomously express, share and discuss their own concerns and ideas in their
own characteristic way within familiar relationship networks under flexible conditions (i.e. anytime, anywhere) and at dramatically reduced communication costs. Like offline networks, online networks are characterized by “weak ties”. In other words, their strength lies in loose organizational ties and easily personalized operational frameworks, which allow individuals to contribute their own identities and (hi)stories instead of adapting to collective interpretative frameworks (Granovetter, 1973). Online communication via SNS, therefore, typically combines the public/formal sphere and the private/informal sphere (Bimber et al., 2005). The personal and the political are no longer mutually exclusive, “and separating the two is both impossible and impractical: they are closely interlinked, encouraged by the conventions and norms of social media.” (Highfield, 2016, p. 15) Politics is thus drawn out of the arcane realm, which the public could generally only access indirectly through elections or party membership, if at all, and is integrated into people’s lives by means of a broad spectrum of social activities outside of institutional politics, as is typical for connective action. Under the given flexible conditions of access to content that is of relevance to the public, this can increase people’s willingness to participate in politics (Bennett et al., 2012; Weinstein, 2014) not least by overcoming the “freeloader effect” that is typical of collective action (Olson, 1965; Bimber et al., 2005). Considering all of this, SNS change the overall social context in which people act with regards to public affairs (Bimber et al., 2012).

Taking into account this process of change from a traditional collective dynamic to a new connective one, it can be argued that the aforementioned contradictory assessments of the impact of social media use on political behavior depend, at least to some extent, on different definitions of participation, which themselves reflect changing notions of democratic life (Bimber, 2012; Dahlgren, 2013). In liberal-representative democracies, as codified in the constitutions of many Western countries, political participation (in a “collective” sense) is regarded as an “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either
directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.” (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 38)

In any case, citizens delegate responsibility to political organizations (especially parties) and their representatives. In doing so, they support the performance of the system, i.e. the functions of political organizations, executive and legislative organs on various levels, and the various intermediary actors.

In the context of participatory approaches to democracy, political participation – here often termed “civic engagement” – has a different and broader frame of reference that refers to every “voluntary activity focused on problem solving and helping others, […] undertaken alone or in concert with others to effect change.” (Zukin et al. 2006, p. 7). People do not only want to delegate their sovereign powers, they also want to get involved in political life; they not only want to monitor the decision making process, they also want to feed it with their own personal concerns and ideas. Participation in this “connective” sense means a shift from institutional, duty-based forms to more cause- and civic-oriented forms of engagement (Dalton, 2008), from being only of instrumental value to the people involved (satisfying extrinsic goals subject to economic assessment) to being of intrinsic value, which is derived from fostering civic responsibility and a sense of belonging (Putnam, 2003). Thus, it can be interpreted as a sign of support for the system as such.

Relating these different notions of participation to the ongoing media change, only the latter can be expected to be accompanied by shared content production within social networks and their environment of blurred boundaries between the public and the private sphere, i.e. by a general use of social media, while the former seems to be more associated with the consumption of mass media for political-information-seeking purposes (Bennett et al., 2012).

To test the assumption that possible effects of social media use on political participation depend on how social media is used and how participation is viewed and practiced, and that the kind
of use and the form of participation differ from the use of traditional mass media and its consequences, the study focuses on two hypotheses, which represent two sides of a coin. As Xenos and Moy (2007) have argued, when change in media use patterns has slowed down, at least to a certain degree, such tests seem to be very fruitful. These two hypotheses read like this:

**H1a:** Regular use of online social networks (namely as a general tool for communicating and sharing with others) is more closely associated with civic engagement than it is with traditional political involvement.

And vice versa:

**H1b:** Regular use of mainstream media (namely as a tool for seeking political information) is more closely associated with traditional political involvement than it is with civic engagement.

Although a longitudinal study is needed to measure changes in the relationship between media use and participation, confirmation of the two related hypotheses can be seen as an indication of the co-existence of two different dynamics of political behavior, one of which is a more recent development. Both hypothesized effects should be given, even when controlled for the other respective media use variables, the most important predictors of political participation, such as informedness, political efficacy, satisfaction with democracy and satisfaction with personal life (Inglehart, 1977; Verba et al., 1995; Hooghe & Marien, 2013) as well as basic social stratification markers like gender, age, education, financial situation, community type, and self-assessed socioeconomic status. “Informedness” refers to the self-assessed state of being informed about political matters (e.g., Oppenhuis, 1995; Morales, 2009); “political efficacy” is about the citizens’ feelings “that they have some power to influence the actions of their government” (Wright, 1981, p. 69); and “life satisfaction” and “satisfaction with
democracy” are overall measures which are “relatively autonomous” from each other (Inglehart, 1977, p. 129), with the latter more referring to approval of democratic political institutions and their work than to support of democracy as an idea. That means, for example, that people who are disappointed about the way democracy works are not necessarily against democracy in principle, but wish that it worked better in their country (Schaefer, 2013).

While the previous (two-fold) hypothesis is concerned with the relationship between media use and participation, the second hypothesis aims at analyzing the role that institutional trust might play with regard to political participation and in interplay with changing patterns of media use, thus again referring to a process of transition from a collective to a connective dynamic. Albeit trust in the democratic institutions can be considered as a core concept in political participation (e.g. Inglehart, 1977; Hooghe & Marien, 2013), in a connective dynamic, as already mentioned, institutional loyalties are under question (Bennett et al., 2012; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005)). Some scholars even have argued that the lower institutional trust the higher the probability of engaging in non-institutionalized participation (Kaase, 1999; Hooghe & Marien, 2013). On the other hand, SNS are becoming some kind of loci of power, which partly replace, or at least supplement, work done by hierarchical political organizations, because they provide the necessary structure not only to facilitate expressing, sharing and coordinating individually motivated concerns and ideas, but to interact with others, to link people to larger collectives, and thereby to organize politics – even when it must not be understood in terms of traditional, but of some kind of new “personalized politics” (Bennett, 2012, p. 28). Not comparable to mass-mediated communication, communication via online social networks “becomes an organizational process that goes well beyond the exchange of messages” (Bennett, 2012, p. 28), thus turning SNS into a structuring organizational principle in which people gain trust and confidence (Benkler, 2006; Bennett et al., 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Sweetser, 2014). Given this close relationship between use of and trust in the organizational structure of SNS, it has to be assumed that the effect of social media use on civic engagement
(as predicted by H1a) depends on the amount of trust people have in SNS for ensuring the desired interpersonal connectivity. This constitutes the last hypothesis:

**H2:** The effect of social network use on civic engagement will be stronger for those people who have trust in social network services than for those who have not, while institutional trust loses its importance in predicting civic engagement (as compared to predicting traditional political involvement).

**Data and Method**

Considering the global nature of media change, the present study covers new ground in its attempt to investigate the effects of media use and trust on the various forms of political participation by applying a transnational design that has been contextualized in a model of connective action. The study is based on comparative data provided by the Eurobarometer, a survey carried out on behalf of the European Commission twice a year in all EU countries. It is based on a multistage, stratified sample of around 1,000 EU citizens aged 15 and older per country (exceptions being Luxembourg, Malta and Cyprus, with only about 500 participants, and Germany and the UK, where separate surveys were conducted in West and East Germany and in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, respectively, resulting in a larger number of interviews). The random route procedure that was applied begins with a random number of sampling points, which representatively reflect the structure of the population in relation to its regional distribution. Despite some weaknesses, the Eurobarometer surveys are an important source of data for Europe-wide comparative studies, and, not least due to the continual refinement of their methods and the scientific quality control procedures applied, they serve as a model for numerous multinational surveys (Kaase & Saris, 1997).

The Eurobarometer offers a unique corpus of data for the present inquiry. One survey in its 76th round in autumn 2011 was devoted to the topic of media use in the EU. In comparison
to earlier surveys, this focused strongly on the position of online social networks in political communication, while a second set of questions surveyed political attitudes and behaviors. Such a broad repertoire of questions on media use has not been repeated in subsequent surveys, and so far an analysis of the relationship between the two sets of variables has neither been carried out in the European Commission’s own Eurobarometer reports (European Commission, 2012) nor in academic literature.

The following study focuses on the EU-15 countries, in other words the member states before the eastward enlargement of the European Union in January 2004. This restriction was chosen in the interest of a more homogeneous basis for the study since contextual factors relating to both the political and media system are seen as having a considerable but as yet underexplored influence on the matter under investigation here (Perea et al., 2012). The Eurobarometer 76.3 data was gathered in November 2011 by TNS Opinion & Social using personal (face-to-face) interviews in the respondents’ national languages (N = 15,498). The data was then weighted in line with the national population sizes to calculate the aggregate values and mean values for all EU citizens; the oversampling for Germany’s new federal states (i.e. former East Germany) and Northern Ireland was also corrected by a weighting factor.

To clarify possible connections between political participation, media use and trust, all these variables are measured in different ways according to the assumptions about “collective” and “connective” action. The impact of media use and trust is controlled for the most important conventional predictors of participation, such as informedness, efficacy, and (dis)satisfaction with democracy and personal life, as well as for the most basic social stratification markers like age, sex, education, financial situation, community type, and self-assessed socioeconomic status (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2006; Hooghe & Quintelier, 2013).
**Different Forms of Political Participation**

The Eurobarometer questions used to operationalize various forms of political participation are slightly revised versions of the two questions of Inglehart’s “cognitive mobilization indicator” (Inglehart, 1977; 1990; Inglehart & Rabier, 1979), which aim at measuring what Inglehart, drawing on Barnes and Kaase (1979), called “unconventional” forms of participation in contrast to more conventional types that “may require little or no cognitive response to current issues” (Inglehart, 1990, p. 340). However, in light of the recent changes in participation behavior outlined here, one question points more to connective, and the other to collective, action.

This becomes obvious when they are viewed in the context of Ekman and Amnå’s (2012) typology of latent and manifest political participation, which combines representative and participatory approaches in democracy theory and thus integrates conventional and newer forms of participation into one single model (see Table 2). Focusing on “involvement” and “civic engagement” as the two latent forms, “civic engagement” concerns all “activities based on personal interest” (Ekman & Amnå, 2012, p. 292; emphasis added), among them the willingness to engage in personal conversations to try to convince the people in one’s professional and private life about the things that one considers right and important – a definition that comes very close to Bennett and Segerberg’s (2013) description of “connective action.” The relevant “cognitive mobilization” question is: “Do you sometimes try to persuade your friends, relatives or colleagues to share an opinion that is very important to you? Does this happen often/from time to time/seldom/never?” (Eurobarometer 76.3, QA3) Defining the indicator in this way explicitly anchors civic engagement offline, in real-life behavior, and therefore beyond a purely virtual manifestation of “point-and-click democracy” (similar: Boulianne, 2009).
On the other hand, “involvement” can be defined as “a basic curiosity” about political and societal matters that “precedes both ‘civic’ and ‘political’ activities” (Ekman & Amnå, 2012, p. 293). Thus it depends on how involvement is defined and whether it can be related to connective or collective behavior (Martín & van Deth, 2007). The wording of the appropriate Eurobarometer question is limited to purely political matters: “When you are with friends or relatives, would you say that you discuss national/European political matters often, occasionally, or never?” (Eurobarometer 76.3, QA2) Thus it can be interpreted as a precondition for collective action because, as long-term studies have shown, people who are interested in institutional politics – here operationalized as taking part in political discussions about European and national matters – are more likely to vote (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & MacPhee, 1963; Verba et al., 1995; van Deth & Elff, 2004). When constructing this dependent variable, we merged the two aforementioned items into one scale (α = .82) while excluding a third item mentioned by the Eurobarometer questionnaire – interest in local matters – since local matters are more likely to be of personal concern and are thus more closely related to civic engagement (Crouch, 2004). Because connective action is explicitly anchored in offline behavior, and is thus more “traditional”, the measurement of collective action goes beyond voting as the “easiest and most widespread form of participation” (Inglehart, 1977, p. 300), and refers to individual predispositions to attend to politics. Thus avoiding a black-white framework, the results of the analyses can be expected to be more valid.

In order to avoid over-interpreting the information of the Eurobarometer’s variables, both indices were dichotomized (see Inglehart, 1990). The first two answer categories (referred to as “strong” and “medium” in the Eurobarometer questionnaire) were combined, as were the last two (“low” and “not at all”), yielding the result that 58.9% of respondents are interested in institutional politics. In a similar manner, the different answers to the question about the
readiness to try to persuade others were put together into two categories: “often” and “from time to time” as well as “seldom” and “never” (high level of readiness: 47.1%).

**Media Use**

As explained previously, the key explanatory variables for the exercise of specific participation options are the intensity and motivation of media use. When operationalizing these variables, it should be borne in mind that, in online communication, the boundaries between public and private spheres are likely to be blurred (Bimber et al., 2005). For the empirical study, this means an expansion of previous models (which often only include an isolated operationalization of the “news search” via SNS) toward an operationalization of the intentional and a general use of online social networks. The general, non-intentional use (Eurobarometer 76.3, QD3.6), is measured on a six-point scale from “never” to “every day” (M = 2.72; SD = 2.11), and the intentional use of these networks as a source of political information is represented by an index based on three “yes/no” questions concerning the deliberate search for political information about national and European matters as well as for the usefulness of this information (Eurobarometer 76.3, QD6.3, QD7.3, QD12.3). The reliability analysis of the index yielded a highly acceptable value of the Kuder-Richardson (KR-20) formula for dichotomous items of .80 (scale from 0 to 3; M = 1.19; SD = .58).

The importance of a more general use of SNS for connective political action is counterbalanced by the significance of the intentional use of traditional mass news media for seeking political information in collective action. This supposed opposition is based on the assumption that a change in information and communication technologies leads to changes in forms of communication, thus transforming the structures of the political public sphere (Seethaler, 2013). For a long time (and particularly driven by television as the first and only mainstream medium), keeping oneself politically informed via the media had become a sort of
social norm and was the prerequisite for qualified political participation within the terms of a collective dynamic. For the present study, a political media use index has been constructed to examine the role of the intentional use of mass media for seeking political information. The additive index is based on several dichotomous questions about the offline and online use of television, radio, and print media as means of seeking political information on national and European issues (Eurobarometer 76.3, QD4t.1-3, QD5t.1-3, QD6.2, QD7.2, QD9.3-6, QD12.2; scale from 0 to 9; M = 4.97; SD = 2.16). The reliability index value (KR-20 = .67) is not especially high, but acceptable. In addition, the general use of television, radio and printed media (Eurobarometer 76.3, QD3.1+2,3,4) was each measured on a six-point scale from “never” to “every day” in the Eurobarometer and combined into a media use index (α = .79; M = 4.92; SD = 1.05).

**Trust**

Considering differences in trust levels between national and international institutions, two additive indices have been constructed to measure trust in political institutions of the nation states and in the most important institutions of the European Union, comprising two and three dichotomous items, respectively. The two questions that make up the “national trust index” are aimed at the respective national government and national parliament (KR-20 = .80; scale from 0 to 2; M = .54; SD = .81; Eurobarometer 76.3, QA10.6-7); the “EU trust index” consists of three questions which measure trust in the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council (KR-20 = .89; scale from 0 to 3; M = .99; SD = 1.27; Eurobarometer 76.3, QA14.1-3).

The index for trust in SNS is based on agreement (measured on a four-point scale from “agree completely” to “disagree completely”) with the following statements in the Eurobarometer questionnaire: that social networks “offer a modern way to keep abreast of
political affairs,” “get people interested in political affairs,” and “offer a good way to have your say on political issues.” A fourth available item was excluded after reliability analysis (α = .83; scale from 1 to 4; M = 2.70; SD = 0.76). For all the questions about trust in relation to online social networks there was – in contrast to all the other items cited here – a large number of “don’t know” answers (from 27.3 to 28.2%). In view of the sensitivity of these items, in the statistical analyses the missing answers were not included.

Control Variables: Political Attitudes and Sociodemographic Characteristics

The control variables selected serve to test the connections observed between media use and political participation in connective and collective structures. They encompass political attitudes like informedness, efficacy, and satisfaction with democracy and personal life, which are usually considered as strong predictors of participation, as well as some of the most basic and important social stratification markers: age, sex, education, financial situation, community type, and socioeconomic status (SES).

The Eurobarometer provides an “informedness” index on a four-point scale, ranging from “very well” to “very badly”, based on the respondents’ subjective assessment of how well informed they felt they were about European matters (Eurobarometer 76.3, QD2; M = 2.81; SD = .73). The highly disputed (Arzheimer, 2008) operationalization of political efficacy follows the example of several studies (e.g., Bennett, 1997; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Bachmann et al., 2010; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014) in utilizing a single measure, such as whether “my voice counts in the EU” (Eurobarometer 76.3, QA19a.3: 26.7%). Satisfaction with democracy was based on two questions asking whether the respondent is satisfied with the way democracy works in her or his country as well as in the European Union (measured on a four-point scale from “very satisfied” to “not at all satisfied”; Eurobarometer 76.3, QA18.a,b; α = .73; M = 2.64; SD = .74). For the “personal satisfaction” variable, the Eurobarometer
questionnaire provides the question (QA1): “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?”. Again, answers were measured on a four-point scale (M = 2.04; SD = .77).

The sociodemographic variables (Eurobarometer 76.3, D8, D10, D11, D25, D61, QC2) include age, gender (female: 51.5%), the level of education (evaluated using a four-point scale: less than high school, high school graduate, some college training, college graduate; the median was high school graduate), the type of community the respondent lives in (rural village = 32.8%; small or middle sized town = 43.2%; large town = 24.0%), and the socioeconomic status (self-assessment on a scale from 1 to 10; M = 5.60; SD = 1.53). The financial situation of the household is reflected by three categories describing the current situation as not allowing the respondent “to make any plan for the future” (34.3%), to make plans for “the next six months” (30.7%), to have “a long-term perspective of what [their] household will be in the next one or two years.” Finally, because the data set encompasses 15 European countries, all regressions were controlled for possible country effects.

Results
The first hypothesis expects the use of online social networks – especially as a general tool for communicating and sharing – to be more strongly associated with civic engagement than with involvement in traditional institutional politics. We tested this expectation in two ways: firstly with simple and partial correlations between various forms of media use and participation, and secondly by applying logistic regression models (because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variables) in order to control for the influence of other factors, such as political attitudes and sociodemographic characteristics, as well as to examine the odds ratios for the various effects. Because of the different scales of measurement, a z-transformation of all interval-scaled predictor variables was carried out to create a common metric.
Use of social media and use of mainstream media were, to a great extent, revealed as different dimensions since seeking political information in mainstream media and seeking political information in social media were not significantly correlated ($r = .015$, $p = .065$) and seeking political information in social networks was negatively correlated with general media use ($r = -.029$, $p < .001$). Conversely, seeking political information in mainstream media was negatively correlated with general social media use ($r = -.022$, $p = .006$). Only general use of both mainstream and social media was slightly correlated ($r = .025$, $p = .020$). However, for both kinds of media, general and intentional use were strongly related to each other (social media: $r = .363$, $p < .001$; mainstream media: $r = .475$, $p < .001$). We therefore ran partial point-biserial correlation analyses to test the association between the various forms of media use and participation. (Point-biserial correlation analysis is employed because one variable is expressed as interval data and the other variable is represented by a dichotomous nominal scale.)

Consistent with our expectation, the partial point-biserial correlation (with control for intentional use of SNS) is 0.126 ($p < .001$) between general use of SNS and civic engagement, and 0.002 ($p = .804$) between general use of SNS and political involvement (see columns 1 and 2 on Table 3). With regard to the relationship between the various types of media use and civic engagement, all other correlation coefficients are smaller than .126, and compared to the correlation of general use of SNS and civic engagement, the differences in the strength of the correlations are statistically significant, according to Steiger’s (1980) $z$-test for overlapping dependent correlations (see upper part of Table 4). Concerning the comparison of each pair of correlations between a particular type of media use and both forms of participation, standardized scores show that most of these differences are statistically significant (see column 3 on Table 3). Only general use of SNS, however, is more closely associated with civic engagement than it is with traditional political involvement ($z = 12.708$, $p < .000$). All other $z$-scores point in the opposite direction, with intentional use of social networks for seeking
information playing a comparatively minor and rather similar role for both forms of participation ($z = -1.675, p = .052$). These tests support H1a.

On the other hand, the partial point-biserial correlation (with control for general mainstream media use) is .246 ($p < .001$) between intentional mainstream media use and political involvement, and .102 ($p = < .001$) between intentional mainstream media use and civic engagement. Accordingly, the intentional use mainstream media is more closely associated with traditional political involvement than it is with civic engagement ($z = 15.035$, $p < .000$). Although the latter correlation is also positive, it is not as strong as the one between general SNS use and civic engagement ($z = 2.078$ in favor of general use of SNS, $p = .019$). However, regarding political involvement, correlation with intentional mainstream media use is by far the strongest, and compared to the correlation between involvement and all other types of media use, the differences in the strength of the correlations are statistically significant (see the results of Steiger’s $z$-test in the lower part of Table 4). H1b is therefore also supported.

To explore these relationships further, we constructed two logistic regression models: one for each dependent variable (see Table 5, Models 1a and 2). Originally, the independent variables were entered in several separate blocks (in order to determine the amount of variance explained by the various sets of predictors), but in this paper only the overall results are reported. The regression analyses provide additional clear evidence of the assumed relationships between various kinds of media use and different forms of participation. As expected (and already substantiated by the results of the correlation analyses), the different emphases in media use correlate with different forms of political participation. When it comes to civic engagement (Table 5, Model 1), frequency of general use of SNS is the most important media use indicator in predicting this kind of participation (as indicated by the odds ratio values), while their intentional use plays only a minor role. This means that accessing politically relevant content can incidentally increase people’s willingness to engage in socially
relevant matters. The specific nature of SNS to combine the public and private spheres clearly promotes (and does not jeopardize) political participation in a broader sense. Contrarily, mainstream mass media has to be primarily used intentionally as a source of political information, but even in this respect there is only a comparatively minor influence on civic engagement.

On the other hand, the intentional use of mass media as a source of political information is by far the most decisive media use predictor of political involvement as a more latent form of participation in the sense of collective action (Table 5, Model 2a). Albeit the general use of mass media also plays some role, the probability that people become involved in politics because of intentional use of mass media is about three times higher (Exp($b$) = 1.431) than because of a more general media use (Exp($b$) = 1.143). In contrast, SNS do not have any relevance in the context of traditional political involvement. All together, these results are further confirmation of both hypotheses H1a and H1b in terms of connective and collective action.

All media effects are not only controlled for country effects (which are not further discussed in this paper5), but also for both political attitudes (informedness, efficacy, and satisfaction with democracy as well as with personal life) and social stratification factors. Most control variables become less important – such as (high) level of education, (high) informedness, (high) efficacy, and the type of community (large town) – or lose any importance – such as (good) financial situation and (high) socioeconomic status – when it comes to civic engagement. Gender has a similar impact on both measures of participation (with women playing a less significant role); and with regard to both satisfaction measures results are in line with previous studies which showed that “post-materialists” are not only more likely to be dissatisfied with the current status of democracy than more traditionally oriented people, but they tend to be more inclined to change the status quo (Inglehart, 1977; 1990). On the other
hand, life satisfaction, which is usually assumed to vary little from one social group to another, seems to be a general prerequisite for political participation. However, a much more decisive difference can be observed between the effects of age on the various forms of participation. While older people show a significantly higher level of traditional political involvement, they display a significantly lower level of civic engagement. This seems to indicate an ongoing shift in the forms of political participation.

The second hypothesis (H2) predicts that the effect of social media use on civic engagement depends on the amount of trust people have in SNS as organizational units for ensuring the desired connectivity. This effect should be given even when controlled for trust in conventional political institutions, which is assumed to lose importance for participation (as compared to predicting traditional political involvement). To test this assumption we examined the interaction effects of general use of social media with trust in them (Table 5, Model 1b). The results indicate that trust in SNS positively moderates the relationship between respondents’ use of SNS and their participation in civic activities, but only to a small extent (p = .10). This means that when there is high trust in the organizational structure provided by SNS, an increase in their use as tools for political communication increases the impact on civic engagement. Low trust, however, has a reverse effect (see Figure 1).

The moderating effect of trust in SNS is controlled for trust in political institutions. In order to explore the assumed changes in trust, we computed a second model for predicting traditional political involvement, which includes – besides all media use variables and control variables – all three trust variables, but does not include the interaction effect (Table 5, Model 2b). As it could have been expected, trust in SNS does not play any role in a collective action dynamic. At both the national and the European level trust in democratic institutions has a significant but not particularly high impact on involvement, while no shift in trust from political institutions to SNS could be observed. As expected, they only serve as organizational units of connective action. Contrarily, trust in national political institutions loses any importance, when
it comes to civic engagement, while trust in European institutions retains its significance as a predictor of participation also in a connective action dynamic. However, its β-value (β = .063, p < .05) differ significantly from the one in the political involvement model (β = .118, p < .001). Taken all together, H” can be confirmed, but only to a lesser extent than expected.

Discussion and Conclusion

Decline in trust in democratic institutions has opened the way to considering the role participatory concepts of democracy and citizenship in fostering popular acceptance of the democratic system. These concepts unsettle liberal notions of representative government and rational citizens who engage in politics through traditional political institutions and media outlets, and they promote voluntary activities aimed at solving social problems as acts of participation, regardless of whether they were undertaken alone or in concert with others to effect change. This ongoing transformation of democratic society is accompanied by an ever more widespread use of online social networks that revolutionize the way people communicate. They do this not only by providing new opportunities to connect with others, but also – and perhaps in even more importantly in the realm of political communication – by blurring the boundaries between the public and private sphere.

To analyze possible connections between the various forms of political participation (as a dependent variable) and the various kinds of use of SNS (compared to traditional media use), the present study is based on a theoretical contextualization formulated by Bennett and Segerberg (2012; 2013). Here, the changing character of participation and the role of the media are conceptualized within a model of so-called “connective” action (in contrast to traditional “collective” action). As a new dynamic, connective action is fundamentally different from the institutionalized forms of collective action, and means a move away from the established political system and its group-based identities and interests toward individualized, media-
networked forms of civic engagement. Within this connective environment (in which particularly young people operate), SNS are not only supposed to bring about politically relevant media-based interactions (not least due to the blurring of boundaries between public and private life), but also to function as key organizational units by guaranteeing the desired connectivity. Therefore, trust in the organizational power of SNS is assumed to take the place of one of the previous driving forces of political participation: trust in conventional political institutions. This also implies changes in the function of traditional mass media, which is gradually superseded as a source of political information.

To capture this fundamental social change (and thereby to clarify some contradictory assessments of the effects of social media use), participation was measured in two different ways, reflecting various notions of democracy: as political involvement (according to “collective” action in representative democracy) and as civic engagement (according to “connective” action in participatory democracy). The indicators used are based on Inglehart’s “cognitive mobilization” approach. They measure latent, or “unconventional”, forms of participation (in order to provide comparable results). Political involvement is evidenced by interest in institutional politics, and civic engagement by a willingness to persuade others to share one’s own perspective on social issues that are seen as personally relevant.

Using these indicators, analysis of the EU-15 data from the autumn 2011 Eurobarometer survey clearly shows a co-existence of patterns of collective and connective action. As assumed in hypotheses H1a and H1b, SNS play a significant role when it comes to civic engagement while the use of mainstream mass media is closely associated to political involvement. However, it is not only the frequency, but also the kind of use that matters. Mainstream mass media retains its position as the prime source of political information – particularly when somebody is interested in institutional politics. In a “collective” environment, social media is only able to exert a very small and insignificant influence on
participation when, like traditional mass media, it is intentionally used for seeking political information. On the other hand, SNS unfold their potential for fostering civic engagement when they are used as a general tool for communicating and sharing all kinds of everyday content. It can be argued that the effect of this general, not intentionally political, use of social media is attributable to the blurred boundaries between the public and the private spheres (for similar results regarding the Internet in general, see Cantijoch, 2012; Perea et al., 2012), which allow personal concerns that might become politically relevant issues to be shared: “The personal is political on social media.” (Weinstein 2014, 2010) This interpretation is underlined by the decreasing importance of how well informed one feels about and how much one feels they have a say in institutional politics, because, in connective structures, conventional political decision-makers no longer constitute the primary reference points of political and social activities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 752). The odds ratios for the informedness and efficacy variables show that the expected increase of civic engagement (for a one-unit change in the independent variable) is more than 43 percent and almost 12 percent, respectively, lower than the expected increase of political involvement (Exp\(b = 1.218\) vs. 1.710; 1.174 vs. 1.293). On the other hand, satisfaction with democracy has a significantly negative impact only on civic engagement, not on political involvement (Exp\(b = .936\) vs. .962), or, to put it the other way round, dissatisfaction with how democracy works leads to civic engagement, but it does not lead to political involvement. Though there is no reason to expect that people are going to perceive institutional politics as obsolete, there seems to be a trend of perceiving politics outside of the traditional political realm.

In any case, use of social media coincides with an expansion of a circle of people who become actively engaged in civic life. Most importantly, age is one of the most decisive predictors of both forms of participation. As expected, the younger the people, the more they are inclined to civic engagement, while older people display a significantly higher level of
traditional political involvement. This can be seen as an indication for the co-existence of two different dynamics of political action, with the latter as the more recent one. It seems to be justified to interpret this co-existence as a sign of a shift from collective to connective action.

The findings of our study provide some more evidence of an ongoing change in political behavior. As the results for the control variables show, the typical representative of traditional political involvement is a better-educated, financially well-situated, wealthy male who lives in big cities and finds himself in a good position in society. Most of these characteristics are becoming obsolete, or at least less important, when it comes to civic engagement. People who are not involved in “collective” structures because of their low level of education, low income, rather low socioeconomic status and the rural environment they live in, and who would therefore be considered politically apathetic, can be more easily reached through connective structures – even in the context of politically relevant issues.

With exception of an enduring gender gap, the findings presented here suggest that SNS do have the potential to mobilize people. However, one of the greatest challenges currently facing politics is to discover what consequences this might have. This seems not to be an easy task, because trust in the conventional political institutions is on the wane. Even in the context of traditional political involvement trust in both national and European political institutions is among the less influential political attitudes variables included in the analysis. Regarding EU institutions, the expected increase of political involvement (in case of a one-unit change in the independent variable) is only 11.8 percent – and this low increase is cut in half with regard to civic engagement. Trust in national political institutions is slightly more important in the context of involvement (Exp(\(b\)) = 1.151), but does not count in predicting engagement. On the other hand, the results of our analyses provide some small evidence about a shift in trust from conventional political institutions to SNS as organizational units of political action.

In contrast to traditional mass media SNS does not refer to the content of communication, but to the organizational structure provided to ensure the connectivity
necessary for communicating and sharing ideas, building relationships, and engaging in political and societal matters. Therefore, we expected trust in SNS as key organizational units of connective action to moderate the relationship between social media use and civic engagement. This assumption can be confirmed only to a certain extent in that trust in SNS seems to increase the readiness to use them as a tool that is able to participate in and organize civic activities. Thus SNS fulfill, at least to some extent, functions usually attributed to political institutions which are, in a democratic system, obliged to provide “opportunities, mechanisms and the space within which to take part in society” (Anheier, Stares, & Granier, 2004, p. 98).

The present study breaks new ground in its attempt to base the analysis of the relationship between media use, trust and participation on a broad data set, representative of the populations of fifteen European countries. This broad data set (around 15,000 interviews) makes it possible to reach conclusions with greater validity (Kaase & Saris, 1997). Nevertheless, the study has several shortcomings. For instance, the Eurobarometer can only be used to operationalize factors on the micro level, yet the changes to the relationship between media and participation also have a macro dimension. This is because contextual factors relating to both the political system and the media system are often seen as having a considerable but as yet underexplored influence on this relationship (Perea et al., 2012). Furthermore, survey data that has not been gathered specifically for the purpose of this study is far from ideal for operationalizing a theoretical approach since the definitions of the variables are, out of necessity, based on the formulation of the questionnaire. So as not to over-interpret the results of the regression analyses, the values of the dependent variables have been dichotomized, the strictest possible standards were applied to the construction of the indices, and a conservative approach was taken when dealing with missing values and carrying out statistical testing procedures. Furthermore it must be noted that the findings presented are just a snapshot from the year 2011 while the processes and developments in a transitional period –
especially the causal relationships – can only be adequately captured using time series analysis. Unfortunately, later Eurobarometer surveys do not provide comparable and similarly extensive data.

Moreover, the analyses presented here leave room for improvement. The findings presented are based on four models, which were founded on theory and tested using logistic regression equations. An obvious additional step, however, would be to test path models, which represent mutual dependencies between the predictors. For example, both satisfaction variables could be modeled as preconditions for the level of trust in democratic institutions, and interest in institutional politics (as a latent form of political involvement) could be modeled not just as a dependent variable, but also as an intervening variable for the explanation of manifest forms of participation like voting, which are losing ground in Western democracies (cf. e.g. Luskin, 1990; Couldry et al., 2006).

Notes

1 In political science literature, the terms “civil/civic participation” and “engagement” are sometimes used as synonyms (e.g. Zukin et al. 2006); at times they are differentiated according to whether they focus on behavior (“participation” in a more narrow sense) or attitudes (“engagement”) (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Zani & Barrett, 2012). Some authors propose “civic engagement” as an umbrella term, encompassing “political” and “social participation” (Gabriel, 2012).

2 For the construction of the indices, the answers to the individual items were re-coded in reverse order when necessary.

3 Missing values were set to 0, where 0 marks the value that is not of interest: if, for the example, the question was concerned with satisfaction in democracy, then it was assumed that missing answers did not indicate satisfaction. For SES (which was measured on a 10-point scale), missing answers were replaced by the overall mean. Both procedures are admissible when the missing values constitute up to 5% of the population. This proportion is not exceeded among the variables used in this analysis.

4 The Hosmer & Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test was carried out for all the regression models described in Table 5. In each case, the standardized residuals were tested, and the existence of influential cases and multicollinearity was ruled out by approximation using a linear regression.

5 When the regression equations are not controlled for country effects, only two major changes in the \(b\)-values for the independent variables can be observed. With respect to civic engagement, only socioeconomic status becomes more important \((b = .061, \text{Exp}(b) = 1.063; \text{Wald} \chi^2 = 10.677, p < .05)\). Furthermore, the negative impact of general social media use on political involvement becomes statistically significant \((b = -.059, \text{Exp}(b) = .942; \text{Wald} \chi^2 = 4.583, p < .05)\). These few exceptions aside, the EU-15 countries represent for the most part a rather politically and culturally homogeneous area. It has to be added that, strictly speaking, the countries of the respondents represent a second level of analysis. However, an LR-test has revealed that the multilevel null model does not differ significantly from the individual level null model \((\Delta \text{deviance} = 3.3, p > .05)\).
References


### Table 1
Collective vs. Connective Action: Some Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective action</th>
<th>Connective action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group based society</td>
<td>Individualized society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideologically framed issues</td>
<td>Personal ideas about what constitutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“good life”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media as a communication agent</td>
<td>Social media as a communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking political relevant information</td>
<td>platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing of ideas through media-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public sphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal: separation of public &amp; private</td>
<td>Informal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spheres</td>
<td>blurred boundaries between public &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizationally brokered, mobilized and</td>
<td>Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>managed</td>
<td>Self-motivating and largely self-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age &lt; 30 years</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age &gt; 30 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Based on Bennett & Segerberg (2012)

### Table 2
Typology of Forms of Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent political participation</th>
<th>Civic engagement</th>
<th>Manifest political participation</th>
<th>Informal activism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political/social involvement</td>
<td>Civic engagement</td>
<td>Formal participation</td>
<td>Informal activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic curiosity about matters of institutional politics; sense of belonging to a collective with a distinct political profile</td>
<td>attention to societal matters in a broader sense; lifestyle related politics (e.g. music, food, clothes)</td>
<td>e.g. donating money, boycott of firms, persuading others about issues of personal concern, personalized ideas, plans, and grievances</td>
<td>e.g. voting; membership in political parties, trade unions etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Based on Ekman & Amnå (2012, p. 292)
Table 3
Correlations Between Various Forms of Media Use and Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of media use</th>
<th>Civic engagement</th>
<th>Political involvement</th>
<th>Correlations difference (z-score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNS: general use</td>
<td>.126*** (.145***)</td>
<td>.002 (.020*)</td>
<td>12.708***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS: intentional use</td>
<td>.027*** (.078**)</td>
<td>.046*** (.051**)</td>
<td>-1.943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media: general use</td>
<td>.057*** (.100***)</td>
<td>.110*** (.247***)</td>
<td>-5.442***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media: intentional use</td>
<td>.102*** (.125***)</td>
<td>.246*** (.327***)</td>
<td>-15.035***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cell entries in columns 1 and 2 are two-tailed partial point-biserial correlations $r_{pb}$ (in parentheses: zero-order point-biserial correlations)

* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001

Table 4
Pairwise Correlation Differences Between Types of Media Use and Civic Engagement and Political Involvement Respectively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SNS: intentional use</th>
<th>Mass media: general use</th>
<th>Mass media: intentional use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS: general use</td>
<td>10.961***</td>
<td>6.300***</td>
<td>2.078*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS: intentional use</td>
<td>-2.568**</td>
<td>-6.795***</td>
<td>-15.035***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media: general use</td>
<td>-2.568**</td>
<td>-6.795***</td>
<td>-15.035***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media: intentional use</td>
<td>-5.488***</td>
<td>-16.863***</td>
<td>-21.211***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cell entries are results of Steiger’s z-test for overlapping dependent correlations

* = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001
Table 5
Predicting Civic Engagement and Political Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Civic engagement</th>
<th></th>
<th>Political involvement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1a</td>
<td>Model 1b</td>
<td>Model 2a</td>
<td>Model 2b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b</strong></td>
<td>Wald</td>
<td>Exp((b))</td>
<td>Wald</td>
<td>Exp((b))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countrya</td>
<td>152.737***</td>
<td>142.928***</td>
<td>331.878***</td>
<td>307.882***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.130</td>
<td>.879</td>
<td>-.110</td>
<td>.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: female vs. male</td>
<td>-1.182</td>
<td>.834</td>
<td>-1.189</td>
<td>.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>1.130</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>1.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial situation</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>5.105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium vs. bad</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>1.102</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>1.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good vs. bad</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>1.113</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>1.128</td>
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<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>1.107</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community type</td>
<td>22.894***</td>
<td>20.381***</td>
<td>33.085***</td>
<td>30.660***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle sized</td>
<td>-.100</td>
<td>.905</td>
<td>-.135</td>
<td>.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>town vs. village</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>1.161</td>
<td>-.236</td>
<td>.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informedness</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>1.281</td>
<td>.230</td>
<td>1.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy: yes vs. no</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>1.174</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>1.113</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>-.067</td>
<td>.936</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td>.910</td>
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<tr>
<td>satisfaction</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>1.099</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>1.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>1.099</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>1.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media:</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>1.103</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>1.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media:</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>1.079</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>1.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General use</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>1.028</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS: Intentional use</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>1.148</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>1.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS: General use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National trust</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>2.878#</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>2.878#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European trust</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>6.066*</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>6.066*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in SNS</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>15.390***</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>15.390***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS: General use × Trust in SNS</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>2.640#</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>2.640#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.996</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>1.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total R2 (Nagelkerke)</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.998</td>
<td>.266</td>
<td>.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>14.598</td>
<td>10.628</td>
<td>14.598</td>
<td>10.628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data: Eurobarometer 76.3. Logistic regressions (metric variables are z-transformed); Exp(\(b\)) = odds ratio values above 1 indicate an increase, odds ratio values below 1 indicate a decrease in the dependent variable.

# \(p < .10\), * \(p < .05\), ** \(p < .01\), *** \(p < .001\)

Variable (15 categories) is only used to control for country effects (see note 5).
Figure 1
Civic Engagement as a Function of General Use of SNS and Trust in SNS

Note. The figure is based on an Excel worksheet, provided by Jeremy Dawson, that plots two-way interaction effects for a logistic regression analysis (www.jeremydawson.co.uk/slopes.htm).