

## Readiness and motivation in digital civic engagement among tertiary students

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### ABSTRACT

This study addresses the challenge of enhancing civic engagement in higher education institutions by examining the predictive relationships between readiness, motivations, and digital civic engagement of tertiary students. Employing the quantitative, correlational research approach, data collected through survey questionnaires were analyzed using Minitab statistical software. Significant insights came from the 2,205 tertiary students selected through multistage random sampling, following strictly ethical standards to ensure data privacy and anonymity. As found, a moderate level of readiness underscores the need for targeted interventions, particularly to improve the civic behavior of students. Understanding and values motives emerged as dominant drivers of engagement, indicating the strong desire of students for personal growth and learning. While respondents occasionally exhibit digital engagement, it leans toward civic activities over political involvement, focusing primarily on information consumption rather than active collaboration. Emerging as a significant predictor of engagement, developing tailored initiatives to enhance readiness is crucial to positively influencing civic participation. Higher education institutions may use these findings to develop digital interventions that serve as catalysts for long-term civic engagement among students and engage in further research on other predictive factors.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To secure sustainable development in communities through participatory and inclusive means, higher education institutions are tasked with advancing the civic mission of education. Mandated by law, civic education is incorporated into curricula to equip students with the skills and competencies necessary for active citizenship. Despite these efforts, studies globally indicate a declining trend in civic engagement in this sector. Among the member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the younger generations are increasingly disengaged from traditional political processes [1], and in the United States, young people are found disengaged from civic life [2]. Studies in the Philippines [3]–[5] similarly reported relatively low levels of civic engagement among tertiary students.

In view of the declining trend in the traditional civic participation of youth today, it becomes crucial to explore alternative avenues where they are highly active. With nearly 95% of young people accessing smartphones and using various social media platforms [6], the prospect of online spaces enhancing civic

engagement cannot be disregarded. Supporting this, previous studies [7], [8] pointed out the potential of digital platforms in facilitating young people's engagement in civic and political affairs within their communities. Leveraging digital spaces for civic engagement can be a valuable strategy for improving young people's participation in formal settings. However, while many scholars focus on the availability, use, and opportunities for civic participation that online platforms provide, critical factors, particularly students' readiness to participate and their motivation to civically engage online, remain underexplored.

Building on the idea that digital spaces could be a valuable strategy for improving young people's engagement [9], this study aims to address the following questions empirically:

- What is the level of students' readiness for digital civic engagement in terms of knowledge, skills, attitude, and behavior?
- What factor motivates students to participate in civic engagement?
- What are the types, purposes, and extent of students' digital civic engagement?
- Do readiness and motivation significantly predict the level of digital civic engagement among tertiary students?

By integrating these psychological (motivation) and behavioral (readiness) dimensions into a predictive model, this study offers a novel framework for understanding and enhancing digital civic engagement in the Philippine context. This study fills a significant gap in local research by being the first to empirically model these predictive relationships, providing valuable insights for the design of digital tools and programs that foster meaningful and sustained participation among tertiary students. Higher education institutions can use the findings as baseline data to develop targeted, data-informed curricular interventions that enable digital platforms to effectively bridge the gap between passive and active participation.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Research design

Conceived to examine the relationships between the cited constructs, this study employed the quantitative, correlational research design. As a non-experimental type of research, this work aimed to quantify the strength and direction of these relationships and ascertain their predictive capacity in determining an outcome [10]. By examining the extent to which readiness and motivation predict digital civic engagement, this study provides data-driven insights into which factor has a greater influence on students' digital civic participation. Ascertaining these predictive relationships is crucial for designing targeted interventions to transition the youth from passive to active civic participation.

### 2.2. Respondents of the study

The sample of 2,975 students was drawn from a population of 40,074 who completed their civic education courses across the campuses of the university in Batangas during the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023. The multistage random sampling method [11] was used to determine the sample, wherein the population was divided into campuses, academic programs, and year levels. The sample from each campus was calculated using the Raosoft sample size calculator, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Subsequently, the number of respondents within each campus was determined using a stratified proportional random sampling technique [12] to ensure representation across academic programs and year levels. Since many fourth-year students were in their internships, the actual response rate was 74% ( $n=2,205$ ), which aligns with typical response rates in large-scale higher education surveys.

Information as to the nature and status of the cited constructs, namely readiness, motivation, and digital civic engagement, was elicited through the utilization of survey questionnaires. These instruments were subjected to expert validation and tested for reliability before administration. Throughout the research process, ethical standards ensuring data privacy and anonymity of respondents who consented to participate in the survey were strictly followed.

### 2.3. Research instruments

To collect the needed quantitative data, the researchers designed a survey questionnaire divided into three parts. The first part is a 20-item scale developed to measure the readiness of respondents for digital civic engagement, focusing on civic knowledge, skills, attitude, and behavior. The second part is a 30-item scale adopted from the volunteer functions inventory (VFI) [13], [14] to assess respondents' motivations for civic engagement. Aligning with the objectives of the study that focus on specific motivational indicators rather than the broader framework, the original structure of VFI was not utilized. Also, a 4-point Likert scale was used instead of 7, ranging from 1 (least important) to 4 (highly important) to simplify the response process for students, reducing cognitive load and enhancing response reliability. The last part of the questionnaire explores the characteristics of respondents' digital civic engagement in to type, purpose, and

extent. This instrument was content validated by five faculty experts from various disciplines at the university. Its reliability was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient above 0.90. This result indicates an excellent reliability level of the constructed questionnaire.

## 2.4. Data analysis

Empirical in nature, this research utilized Minitab statistical software to analyze the quantitative survey responses of tertiary students. Descriptive statistical treatments, specifically measures of central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation), were used to address the first three research questions. Multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the predictive relationships between students' readiness, motivations, and digital civic engagement. These analyses provide key insights that are crucial for the development of targeted interventions aimed at addressing the declining civic engagement of tertiary students.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Readiness of students for digital civic engagement

Given the evident shift towards digital civic engagement, assessing the competencies gained by the students from their civic education as a measure of their readiness for participation online is deemed significant. These competencies may serve as indicators of their readiness to engage meaningfully in the digital realm. Figure 1 presents the civic readiness of tertiary students in terms of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic attitude, and civic behavior.

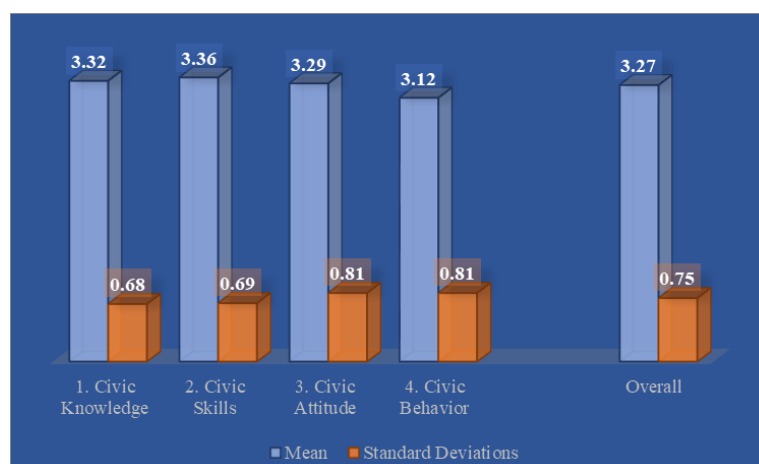


Figure 1. Readiness level of students

As found, civic skills and civic knowledge garnered the highest mean scores of 3.36 and 3.32, respectively. Civic attitude ranked third (3.29), while civic behavior was least rated (3.12) with a similarly high standard deviation of 0.81. Overall, the resulting mean score of 3.27 indicates a moderate level of readiness of students for digital civic engagement.

These findings suggest that the students are equipped to go through online platforms, possessing the necessary competencies and understanding of democratic principles for online participation. They possess a positive disposition and an inclination towards digital civic engagement. The moderate level of readiness of students in the four dimensions highlights the success of civic education in imparting valuable competencies to students necessary to foster a positive online environment.

Notable in these findings is the low resulting mean for civic behavior. Though still at a moderate level, this rating suggests that although the students possess the knowledge and skills to explore digital platforms, they are reluctant or are less likely to participate actively in civic discussions or actions. They become mere consumers of information rather than active participants in civic initiatives. The relatively high level of variability in civic attitude and civic behavior also reveals a significant element of interest in understanding the status of readiness of students for digital civic engagement. This result suggests considerable differences among students in their perceptions and willingness to engage civically online. This can be rooted in the digital divide, resulting in differing levels of exposure of students to online platforms.

Also, personal experiences with online interactions, or concerns related to risks associated with cyberbullying and disinformation, are possible factors affecting civic attitude and behavior. In consonance with this, previous research identified limited access to information [15] and limited opportunities for participation [16] as factors affecting the civic engagement of students. More so, United Nations Development Programme [17] revealed that 73% of students manifested concern about the risks associated with online interactions, such as hate speech and bullying. These are possible factors affecting online participation, particularly the students' civic behavior.

To enhance the readiness of students for digital civic engagement, there is a need to equip them with the skills to critically work with the vast amount of information available online [18]. In addition to critical thinking, media literacy, and ethical online participation could be included in civic education modules to equip students for digital citizenship. More importantly, the development of dedicated digital platforms that provide access to information, a safe environment for free expression, and opportunities for participation could be effective strategies to enhance students' civic behavior and foster active participation in digital democratic processes.

### 3.2. Students' motivations for civic engagement

Understanding civic engagement entails comprehending the underlying factors that motivate individuals to give their time, skills, and resources for the welfare of others and the community. In this research, the motivations of the respondents for civic engagement are categorized into six functional areas, such as protective, values, career, social, understanding, and enhancement factors. The results of the investigation are presented in Figure 2.

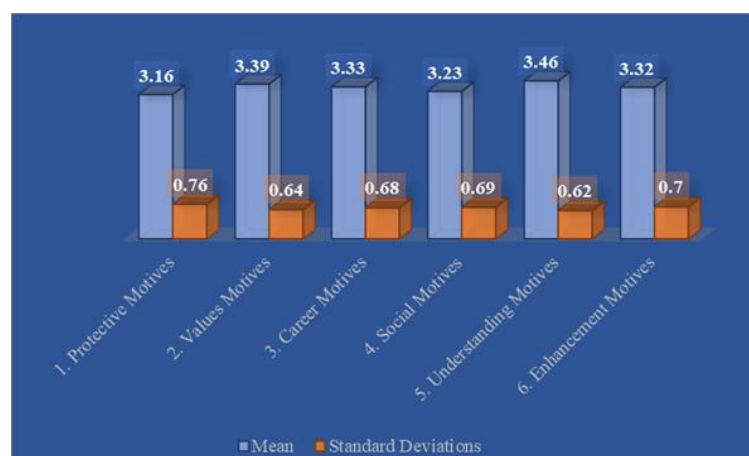


Figure 2. Functional motives for civic engagement

In response to the research question on the primary motivations that influence students' engagement, the understanding motive, with the highest mean score of 3.46, emerged as the prominent factor that drives participation. Following this is the values motive (3.39), which focuses on one's altruistic and humanitarian values. The protective motive received the lowest mean value (3.16) among the six functional motives for civic engagement.

From these findings, it can be surmised that students' motivation to engage civically is primarily influenced by their desire to gain knowledge, better understand, and harness their capabilities. More likely, students participate in civic activities that offer opportunities for intellectual growth, success, and achievement. By rating values motive next in rank, the students also manifested a strong inclination to assist and support those in need. This can be attributed to the Filipinos' religious beliefs, which emphasize compassion and empathy for the needy. Though the protective motive received the lowest mean value, this indicated that the respondents believe this factor is similarly moderate in importance. Since civic engagement often involves interacting with others, the social connection developed during interactions helps students lessen or overcome their loneliness and feelings of isolation. Preparing for their future careers, the students regard this exposure to diverse people as an opportunity to help them know more about themselves and maintain their mental health.

The framework of the VFI views the motivation to start and sustain volunteer work depends on the psychological function an individual is seeking to fulfill. Following this, we can surmise that students' desire for personal growth and fulfillment of religious ethos are significant considerations in mobilizing them for

civic involvement. Parallel to these findings, studies [19]–[22] on what drives the youth to civically engage pinpointed personal growth, intellectual stimulation, and altruism as significantly related to civic engagement.

In line with this, Mokhzan *et al.* [23] contend that understanding and value motives reflect young people's search for personal meaning and purpose in their volunteer activities. They look for opportunities that correspond to their beliefs, passions, and interests, enabling them to participate and contribute to meaningful causes for others. Guided by these findings, higher education institutions may design community projects and volunteer programs that expose students to diverse communities, individuals, and social issues to meet the needs and priorities of the students for self-growth and fulfillment. Civic engagement programs can be made available to students that broaden their understanding of the world, change their preconceptions, develop skills, uncover hidden talents, and experience the joy and satisfaction of changing the lives of others and making a difference. Moreover, with the shift toward digital civic engagement, higher education institutions may develop digital interventions to civically engage students seeking intellectually stimulating and meaningful participation through online platforms.

Overall, notable to these findings are the resulting mean values for all the functional motives interpreted as moderate in importance. It can be surmised that aside from motives, other factors may be influential in an individual's decision to civically engage in traditional or digital platforms. Future studies could explore these additional factors to better understand what drives students' civic involvement.

### 3.3. Digital civic engagement

Understanding the types, purposes, and extent of students' digital civic engagement is essential for educators, policymakers, and researchers to support and enhance students' participation in the digital era. In this section, digital civic engagement classified into civic and political activities is described according to one's purposes using the spectrum of community engagement developed and used in communities in the United States [24]. Accordingly, an individual's intent for digital civic engagement could be to inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and/or empower.

The mean values presented in Figure 3 for both types of activities interpreted as "sometimes" in frequency suggest that the respondents exhibit some level of engagement occasionally rather than regularly. The highest means of 3.44 and 3.09 for civic and political activities, respectively, further characterize the respondents' engagement as inclined more toward information consumption rather than active involvement. It can be noted that the respondents revealed the lowest level of engagement in collaborating for civic activities (3.01) and empowering for political activities (2.66).

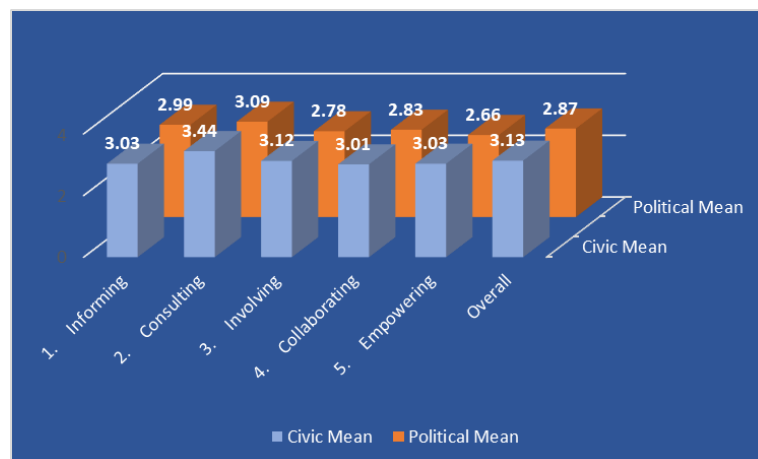


Figure 3. Digital civic engagement of students

The highest mean for consulting can be attributed to the ease of accessing information online today. This aligns with the previous finding that students are more inclined to seek information rather than be actively engaged in civic or political decision-making and action [25]–[27]. For individuals desiring personal growth, the internet allows them to access a wide range of sources and perspectives, enabling them to stay informed about current events [28]. While students actively seek knowledge through consultation from various sources online to keep themselves updated, they hesitate to express and involve themselves fully in the digital realm. Davis and Jurgenson [29] explained the potential risks involved in one's freedom of

expression online, resulting in uncertainty and anxiety for individuals to freely express themselves. The prevalence of misinformation, bullying, and hate speech online are factors resulting in students' skepticism and disinterest in engaging both in civic and political affairs.

These findings support previous results indicating the lowest level of readiness of respondents to digital civic engagement relative to civic behavior. As they may be adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills to explore digital spaces, they merely become information consumers rather than civic actors willing to collaborate and empower others. To bridge the gap between passive to active participation of students, higher education institutions are to find ways and means to encourage meaningful participation in this sector. In addition to the inclusion of digital literacy in their civic education curriculum, providing them with the needed digital platform that addresses their specific needs is crucial. Higher education institutions are to provide them with an online platform specifically designed to offer them informative content, processes, and methods for civic participation. Providing this could deepen their understanding of civic engagement, which could transform them from being recipients to movers for community welfare.

### 3.4. Predictive relationship between variables

To identify the primary determinants of digital civic engagement, this research examined the predictive relationship between readiness, motivation, and digital civic engagement of tertiary students. The analysis involved a regression model to test the significance of each predictor. Table 1 presents the coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values for each predictor, indicating their significance.

Table 1. Significance of predictors (T and P-values)

| Predictor  | Coef     | SE Coef | T-value | P-value | Interpretation                                |
|------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Constant   | -0.07389 | 0.08929 | -0.83   | 0.408   | Not statistically significant ( $p>0.05$ )    |
| Readiness  | 0.78598  | 0.02702 | 29.08   | 0.000   | Highly statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ) |
| Motivation | 0.14997  | 0.02779 | 5.40    | 0.000   | Statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ )        |

As revealed, both readiness and motivation significantly predict digital civic engagement. The resulting coefficient for constant (-0.0739,  $p=0.408$ ) indicates that when both readiness and motivation are zero, engagement levels are not meaningfully different from zero. Since the constant is not significant, it has no practical insight into the model.

The resulting coefficient (0.78598) of readiness reveals having the strongest impact on digital civic engagement. Its high t-value of 29.08 and low p-value (0.000) confirm its significance. This means that as readiness increases by one unit, engagement increases by approximately 0.78598 units, holding motivation constant. While the effect size of motivation is less than readiness, the positive coefficient of 0.150 and p-value (0.000) suggest that it also significantly predicts digital civic engagement. This coefficient suggests that as motivation increases by one unit, engagement also increases by 0.150 units. Comparably, though readiness and motivation have a significant role in predicting digital civic engagement, the strong statistical significance of readiness as revealed in a much larger t-value (29.08) compared to motivation (5.40) underscores the importance of readiness in driving digital civic engagement among the students.

It is significant to note that the model explains approximately 39.2% of the variance in digital civic engagement, indicating the predictive ability of readiness and motivation at a moderate level. This suggests that other unaccountable factors contribute to the remaining 60.8% of engagement variance. Identifying these other contributing factors could be an important interest for further research.

These findings coincide with previous studies [30], [31], which determined the influence of the technological readiness of citizens on their virtual civic activities. As found, the individual's competence in using technology significantly influences their engagement levels. The model emphasizes the need to equip students with the necessary digital skills and foster an environment that encourages meaningful participation. Future initiatives should focus on strategies that enhance readiness while also sustaining motivation to ensure a more engaged digital youth in the future.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Aimed at assessing the status of the constructs and their predictive relationships, the study reveals a moderate level of readiness needing intervention, particularly in the area of civic behavior. Among tertiary students, understanding and values motives emerged as driving forces for civic engagement that lean more toward civic activities than political ones. While engagement is revealed to be occasional, the respondents are found to be more digital information consumers rather than active collaborators. Although both readiness and motivations significantly predict digital civic engagement, readiness revealed a greater influence on students' engagement.

These findings highlight the need to design and implement tailored initiatives that can help students develop both technical skills and awareness of the societal impact of their online participation. It is crucial for those aiming to transform passive young people into active partners for civic engagement to ensure the strengthening of their digital literacy and develop safe online spaces that encourage more meaningful student involvement. Such initiatives can empower the youth to contribute meaningfully and confidently in the digital space.

Moreover, these results open opportunities for future research on additional predictors of student engagement, such as social influence and digital trust, among others. Further studies may explore how these dimensions shape students' willingness to engage online civically. Development research can also be conducted to include the development of digital platforms tailored to the engagement needs of students, fostering responsible and active engagement of students for meaningful participation in both online and offline civic spaces.

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C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nterpretation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : **O**riginal Draft

E : **E**diting

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors of this institutionally funded research declare that we have no known financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The authors state no conflict of interest.

## INFORMED CONSENT

The authors of this research declare that we have obtained informed consent from all the respondents before their inclusion in this study.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this research are available from the corresponding author [MACA], upon reasonable request.

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