

IMPACT OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE ACTIVISM ON SOCIAL SKILLS

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Abstract

The objective of the study conducted was to detect differences in social skills and satisfaction with social support in social activism (online and/or offline). Quantitative, cross-sectional study was conducted with 210 participants, mostly women ($n = 154$; 73.3%), mean age 31.19 years ($SD \pm 11.62$). We used a socio-demographic questionnaire, a questionnaire on social activism, the Social Support Satisfaction Scale and the Social Skills Inventory for data collection. Statistically significant differences were detected among supporters of social causes, presenting these lower scores on "friend satisfaction" and higher scores on the "self-exposure to unknown or new situations" factor when compared to who do not support social causes offline. It was also verified that individuals belonging to Facebook pages and/or groups and those who support online/offline causes, when compared with their counterparts, scored better on the factors "conversation and social skills" and "self-exposure to strangers and to new situations".

Keywords: online activism, social skills, social support.

1 INTRODUCTION

Activism can be perceived as a set of behaviours based on motivations and values associated in solidarity and cooperation, aimed at effecting changes in the respective society in which the activist is included. Therefore, activism is an instance with a social scope. Sperling, Wilkinson and Bencze [1] argue that activism is associated with a participative citizenship, i.e. the term "activist" is related to the voluntary role that a particular individual plays in the environment in which he or she operates.

According to Woodhouse, Hess, Breyman and Martin [2], the term "activism" refers to a set of methods used by groups with relatively little institutional power and with the aim of influencing opinions, policies or practices for normative or democratic purposes. Martin [3] and Sonoda [4] define the term "activism" as an action on behalf of a particular case presupposes that a group of individuals, noting that hardly a single person can make a public and lasting mobilization. Isopp [5] adds that activism is a sphere of social, political and cultural values.

Activists are challengers of policies and practices that seek to achieve social change [3]. Jordan [6] points out as a fundamental fact the existence of a sense of shared identity among the elements of a group of activists in the search for alternative solutions in order to achieve change. In this sense, it is possible to sustain that to act collectively is fundamental to the social activism and, when the subjects involved are bound by a common cause associated to a set of forms of protest, they can be referred as a social movement ([7]; [8]).

1.1 Social movements, activism and technology

The practice of social movements began in the nineteenth century. At the time the practiced activism was managed by a self-defined militancy as revolutionary that in much differs from the activist practices of the present day. It follows that the differences are not only in the historical context, but also in the available resources and forms of contestation, which are fundamental in shaping the actions of activist groups [9]. In recent years we have witnessed social activism based on motivations, values, solidarity and cooperation. Most of the activists choose to organise themselves into organizational and institutionalized structures ([7]; [10]). In fact, throughout the beginning of this century, we have witnessed social movements organized by activists who have worked mainly on social, economic, cultural, political, environmental, animal and religious problems [7]. In the 21st

century, activism plays a strong role in issues such as opposition to racism, protection of the environment, promotion of equality for women [4].

The forms of communication of social movements have been, for a long period of time, restricted to the notion of presence. However, the media have evolved and new perspectives and forms of collective action have emerged, making the use of communication media by activists a natural tendency to potentiate protest actions [11]. The evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has allowed that the activism has also migrated to digital space, resulting in online activism, digital activism or cyber-activism (terms in this paper adopted as synonyms), thus providing a new tool for activist practices through the formation and performance of social movements ([12]; [13]; [14]). According to several authors, the term "digital activism" can be defined as the set of practices carried out in the cyber networks in order to expand the social meanings through the circulation network of discourses and able to collaborate tools on advocacy of common interests ([12]; [15]; [16]). While social technology, cyberspace allows the creation of a single space and a social imaginary that allows the social construction of representations of individuals and networks into groups that can translate social movements on the network. The appropriation of technology by groups enables the creation of social networks, new forms of social aggregation, new social movements and the reformulation of processes of mobilization, activism and organization [17]. The contemporary and technology involved new definitions for the concept of "social movement", always linked to the political perspective. The so-called "new social movements" are comprehensive and encompass the pacifist movements, environmentalists, civil rights and women, among others [17]. A distinct logic of union movements or rural base, the "new movements" are urban and currents shaping reconfiguration of societies. Thus, new concepts of citizenship emerge in the contemporaneity ([18]; [19]).

1.2 Activism and social support

Activism, as a concept of Philosophy and Psychology, can be understood a moral attitude towards external effectiveness opposed to intellectualism [10]. There are definitions that consider that the human spirit is essentially intended for action, and this is the criterion of the value of knowledge. While as an educational process, in the so-called Active School, it advocates activity to the detriment of purely intellectual aspects.

Social skills are social behaviours in an individual's repertoire that help him deal with situations arising in the interpersonal relationships he establishes [20]. Studies on the direct relationship between activism (online and/or offline) and social skills are scarce. However, it is known that individuals who actively participate in the help of social causes tend to develop and acquire skills that help them to change, thus enabling them to have more satisfying lives.

Social support is a complex concept as it encompasses many types and categories, comes from different sources and includes various dimensions and components [21]. Antunes and Fontaine [22] define social support as the functions performed by a group for an individual in certain situations of their life. The set of social support, which can be performed by family, friends, neighbours, form the network of social relations of the individual.

Some authors identify several types of social support: i). emotional support that refers to the feelings of support and concern received, helping the individual to overcome problems; ii). instrumental support that refers to personal or institutional support, promoted by others, in relation to tangible aspects of life such as financial; iii). informational support, which deals with the help received through information and advice that assist the individual in making decisions and understanding complex situations; iv). affective support that contributes to the individual feeling loved and included by others, regardless of his defects and increasing self-esteem; v). perceptual support that demonstrates the help given to the individual to reassess the problem and give it another meaning; vi). social support that refers to social activities that aim at greater well being, achieving that the individual participates in a certain social network and feels integrated ([23]; [24]; [21]).

One can consider two main sources of social support: formal and informal [25]. The formal sources of support cover social and professional organizations and are designed to assist those in need. The informal sources of support are focused on significant others (such as family, friends) and social groups that are likely to support the individual in their daily lives in all activities and normative life events and non-normative [21]. Resende, Ferreira, Naves, Arantes, Roland, Sousa and Abreu [26] point out that life can be satisfactory particularly when the person has a network of social support. In this sense, social support is essential to decrease the isolation and enhances the satisfaction of living individuals [21].

1.3 Activism and social skills

Magalhães and Murta [27] consider that in any interpersonal relationship skills are required so that the coexistence is satisfactory to those involved in the interaction. Social skills are manifested in this context and can be defined by the set of behaviours that contribute to the social competence of an individual and facilitate their interpersonal relationships [20].

Lucca [28] argues that having a range of skills to guarantee opinions and rights so that they conform to the norms of society and suppose the respect and rights of others, ensure the acceptance of the individual by the society of which he is a part and promote a good emotional development. However, an individual may present a broad repertoire of skills but not be able to apply it to achieve his goal in social interaction, for innumerable variables, which means that having a good repertoire of social skills does not in itself guarantee a socially [29].

According to Del Prette [30], social skills can be organized into broad and specific categories: i). social communication skills such as praising, asking and answering questions, asking for feedback in social relationships, initiating, maintaining and closing Conversations; ii). social skills of civility - say please, thank, greet, say goodbye; iii). assertive social coping or advocacy skills such as expressing opinions, accepting or not soliciting, apologizing and admitting failures, establishing affective and / or sexual relationships, ending relationships, expressing anger and asking for behavioural change, Interact with authorities, deal with criticism; iv). empathic social skills, including paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, and expressing support; v). working social skills such as group coordination, public speaking, mediating conflicts, solving problems, making decisions; vi). social skills of expression of positive feeling like making friendship, expressing solidarity and cultivating love.

The learning of social skills composes a spontaneous process through the social interactions that arise throughout life [30]. However, it is important to highlight the contribution of three crucial socialization contexts in their development, including the family, the school and the peer group.

2 METHOD

The study was quantitative and transversal, aiming to identify differences between social activism (online and/or offline) and the dimensions/factors of the "Social Support Satisfaction Scale" and the "Social Skills Inventory". The main goal is to verify if active support in social causes, provided by the general population whether online and/or offline (regardless of the cause), has influence on the satisfaction of the individual with regard to the relationships they establish in their daily life, as well as the existence or not of a greater degree of social skills.

2.1 Participants

The study was developed from a sample of 210 participants, of whom 154 are female (73.3%) and 56 male (26.7%), aged between 15 and 73 years. The mean age is 31.19 years ($SD = 11.62$). Regarding marital status, 137 participants were single (63.8%) and the majority admitted to heterosexual orientation ($n = 199$, 94.8%). As far as literacy is concerned, there is a predominance of participants with higher education qualifications ($n = 152$, 72.4%). Regarding the profession, we found that 66 participants play intellectual and scientific functions (31.4%) and 64 are students (30.5%). We also observed that it is a predominantly urban population ($n = 145$; 69%), living in central Portugal ($n = 125$, 59.5%). The type of sampling used in this study was non-probabilistic.

2.2 Instruments

The protocol of this study was composed of a brief socio-demographic questionnaire, a questionnaire on social activism, the Social Support Satisfaction Scale (SSSS) and the Social Skills Inventory (SSI). The selection of the self-response instruments included in the protocol was performed according to the purpose of the study and according to the respective psychometric characteristics. It should be noted that both the socio-demographic questionnaire and the social activism questionnaire were developed specifically for this empirical research.

The socio-demographic questionnaire consists of closed questions and allowed to collect information on the characteristics of the sample studied by the following variables: gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, profession, qualifications, location and area of residence.

The SSSS is an instrument developed and validated by Ribeiro [25] in order to verify the degree of satisfaction of the individuals with respect to their family, friends, intimacy and social activities. It is a multidimensional self-response Likert-type scale of five points, consisting of 15 items that are grouped into four dimensions: "Satisfaction with Friends" (SF) that measures satisfaction with friendships; "Intimacy" (IN) that measures the perception of the existence of intimate social support; "Family Satisfaction" (FS) measures satisfaction with existing family social support; and "Social Activities" (SA) that measures the satisfaction of the individual with the social activities that he performs. Regarding the psychometric analysis, Ribeiro [25] demonstrated that the SSSS presents good psychometric properties with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. The "satisfaction with friends" dimension has an internal consistency of 0.83, explaining 35% of the total variance. The dimensions "intimacy" and "satisfaction with the family" show an internal consistency of 0.74, explaining 12.1% and 8.7% of the total variance, respectively. The "social activities" dimension has an internal consistency of 0.64, which accounts for 7.3% of the total variance.

The Questionnaire on Social Activism was built specifically for this study in order to measure the degree of activism, online and offline, of the participants.

The Social Skills Inventory, developed by Del Prette and Del Prette [20], is composed of 38 self-response items that describe social situations in different contexts. The instrument is organized into five factors: factor 1 - coping with risk; factor 2 - self-affirmation in the expression of positive affect; factor 3 - conversation and social skills; factor 4 - self-exposure to strangers or to new situations; factor 5 - self-control of aggression in adverse situations. This instrument is presented as a Likert-type scale with five points: 0 (never or rarely), 1 (rarely), 2 (with regular frequency), 3 (very often) and 4 (always or almost always). Regarding the psychometric properties, the authors indicate that the total scale of the instrument has a satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.75$), and in the factors it varies between 0.74 and 0.97 [20].

2.3 Proceedings

The data obtained were processed through the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22.0. We used descriptive statistics (central tendency and dispersion measures), Student's t-test for independent samples, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc Tukey HSD test.

From the Questionnaire on Social Activism were used the answers to the question "supports a social cause?" in order to analyse social activism offline and to the question "Are you part of any Facebook group/page supporting a social cause?" to study online social activism. In order to obtain the level of social activism of the participants, the whole sample was considered ($n = 210$), where a new variable was created called "level of social activism" that included three groups: 0 = those who do not practice any kind of activism; 1 = those who practice at least one type of social activism (offline or online); 2 = those who practice both types of social activism (offline and online).

3 RESULTS

As shown in tab. 1, all SSSS dimensions of the social cause supporters group ($n = 134$) were lower than the non-supportive group ($n = 76$). However, it is in the dimension of Satisfaction with Friends (SF) that there are statistically significant differences ($t = -2.04$; $p = 0.04$) between the two groups regarding satisfaction with social support. This means that individuals who most support social causes are those with a lower satisfaction with friendships.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and Student's *t* tests between satisfaction with social support and offline activism (support group and group that does not support social causes).

Dimensions	Support social causes (<i>n</i> = 134)		Does not support social causes (<i>n</i> = 76)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
SF	17.91	4.01	19.09	4.08	-2.04	0.04
IN	15.44	3.39	16.01	3.40	-1.37	0.17
FS	11.04	2.76	11.68	2.71	-1.62	0.11
SA	9.31	3.01	9.42	2.88	-0.25	0.80
Total	53.71	10.03	56.30	10.31	-1.78	0.08

n = number of subjects in the sample; M = Mean; SD = standard deviation; T = Student's *t*-test; *p* = level of significance; SF = Satisfaction with Friends; IN = Intimacy; FS = Family Satisfaction; SA = Social Activities.

The results presented in tab. 2 show a statistically significant difference between the two groups in the F4 ($t = 2.59, p = 0.01$), i.e., the group of participants that supports social causes offline ($n = 134$) has a higher ability as regards to self-exposure to unknown or new situations.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and Student-*t* tests between social skills and offline social activism (group that supports and group that does not support social causes).

Factors	Support social causes (<i>n</i> = 134)		Does not support social causes (<i>n</i> = 76)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	SD	M	SD		
F1	2.50	0.60	2.57	0.67	-0.85	0.40
F2	3.16	0.58	3.20	0.54	-0.42	0.67
F3	2.42	0.61	2.22	0.82	1.87	0.06
F4	2.53	0.73	2.27	0.70	2.59	0.01
F5	2.06	0.64	2.22	0.70	-1.69	0.09
Total	97.49	15.43	96.97	16.16	0.23	0.82

n = number of subjects in the sample; M = Mean; SD = standard deviation; T = Student's *t*-test; *p* = level of significance; Factor 1 - coping with risk; Factor 2 - self-affirmation in the expression of positive affect; Factor 3 - conversation and social skills; Factor 4 - self-exposure to strangers or to new situations; Factor 5 - self-control of aggression in adverse situations

It can be seen in tab. 3 that groups of participants who belong ($n = 96$) and who do not belong to Facebook pages/groups in support of social causes ($n = 114$) do not present statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$), in relation to none dimension of the Social Support Satisfaction Scale.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and t-Student tests between satisfaction with social support and online social activism

Dimensions	Belonging to FB pages/group (n = 96)		Not belonging to FB pages/group (n = 114)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
SF	18.26	3.91	18.40	4.21	-0,25	0.80
IN	16.10	3.11	15.32	3.60	1.66	0.10
FS	11.19	2.69	11.35	2.82	-0.43	0.67
SA	9.48	3.05	9.25	2.89	0.57	0.57
Total	55.03	9.45	54.32	10.80	0.50	0.62

n = number of subjects in the sample; M = Mean; SD = standard deviation; T = Student's t-test; p = level of significance; SF = Satisfaction with Friends; IN = Intimacy; FS = Family Satisfaction; SA = Social Activities.

Comparing the groups, there are statistically significant differences in F3 ($p = 0.01$) and F4 ($p = 0.02$). This means that the group of participants who belong to Facebook pages / groups in support of social causes ($n = 96$) presents better ability in the conversation factor and social capacity and in the self-exposure factor to unknown or new situations, as presented in Tab. 4.

Table 4. Means, standard deviations and Student t-tests between social skills and online social activism

Factors	Belonging to FB pages/group (n = 96)		Not belonging to FB pages/group (n = 114)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
F1	2.50	0.62	2.54	-0.42	-0.42	0.68
F2	3.20	0.58	3.16	0.49	0.49	0.62
F3	2.47	0.64	2.24	2.50	2.50	0.02
F4	2.57	0.73	2.33	2.37	2.37	0.02
F5	2.05	0.57	2.18	-1.47	-1.47	0.14
Total	98.44	15.72	96.34	0.97	0.97	0.34

n = number of subjects in the sample; M = Mean; SD = standard deviation; T = Student's t-test; p = level of significance; Factor 1 - coping with risk; Factor 2 - self-affirmation in the expression of positive affect; Factor 3 - conversation and social skills; Factor 4 - self-exposure to strangers or to new situations; Factor 5 - self-control of aggression in adverse situations

As can be seen in tab. 5, factor 3 and factor 4 of the Social Skills Inventory show statistically significant differences with respect to the groups related to the level of social activism practiced. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that in Factor 3 (conversation and social skills) of SSI the mean differences of the non-active group ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.84$) are significantly different from the group practicing both types of activism ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.64$). As for F4, the same comparisons indicate that the mean differences of the non-active group ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.70$) are significantly different from the group practicing both types of activism ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.74$).

These data suggest that the higher the level of activism practiced, the greater the score on the factor of conversation and resourcefulness and the factor of self-exposure to unknown or new situations. Concerning the other areas, both SSSS and SSI, there are no statistically significant differences in the level of activism practiced by the participants.

Table 5. Comparisons between the level of social activism and the SSSS and SSI scales (ANOVA)

	No activism (0) <i>n</i> = 66		Activism online or offline (1) <i>n</i> = 58		Activism online and offline (2) <i>n</i> = 86		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
SF	19.15	4.14	17.60	4.08	18.21	3.94	2.34	0.10
IN	15.98	3.40	14.84	3.75	16.01	3.08	2.46	0.09
FS	11.73	2.74	10.93	2.83	11.16	2.70	1.42	0.25
SA	9.48	2.89	8.93	2.86	9.53	3.07	0.82	0.44
Total	56.35	10.39	52.31	10.79	54.91	9.40	2.51	0.08
F1	2.63	0.65	2.39	0.59	2.54	0.61	2.34	0.10
F2	3.20	0.55	3.11	0.56	3.20	0.59	0.52	0.59
F3	2.20	0.84	2.29	0.57	2.49	0.64	3.57	0.03
F4	2.24	0.70	2.45	0.70	2.58	0.74	4.21	0.02
F5	2.22	0.68	2.14	0.81	2.03	0.53	1.66	0.19
Total	97.67	15.77	94.16	15.86	99.14	15.30	1.80	0.17

n = number of subjects in the sample; *M* = Mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *F* = ANOVA; *p* = level of significance; SF = Satisfaction with Friends; IN = Intimacy; FS = Family Satisfaction; SA = Social Activities; Factor 1 - coping with risk; Factor 2 - self-affirmation in the expression of positive affect; Factor 3 - conversation and social skills; Factor 4 - self-exposure to strangers or to new situations; Factor 5 - self-control of aggression in adverse situations

Considering the scores of factors 3 and 4 among the three levels of social activism, it is possible to verify that only in levels 1 and 2, i.e., online or offline activism and online and offline activism, respectively, these were significant. With regard to these two levels of social activism, it was possible to verify that these participants present means significantly different from those of participants who do not practice any kind of activism.

4 CONCLUSION

In the analysis carried out to detect differences in social skills and satisfaction with social support in social activism (online and/or offline), we obtained different results. While no relationship between online activism and satisfaction with social support was found between offline activism and satisfaction with social support, there were statistically significant differences with respect to the dimension of satisfaction with friends (SF): the offline activists showed less satisfaction with their friendships. The results do not seem to corroborate Castells's [31] perspective when he states that, as a rule, ICT and Internet users are beings with more friends and more socially active than nonusers - despite having friends does not necessarily translate to satisfaction. From these results, we questioned whether dissatisfaction with Social Support strengthens adherence to social causes.

Concerning social skills, it was observed that the group of participants that supports social causes offline presents statistically significant higher scores in factor 4 "self-exposure to unknown or new situations" when compared to the non-activist offline group. As for the group that belongs to Facebook pages/groups in support of social causes, we found higher scores on factor 3 "conversation and social skills" and factor 4 "self-exposure to strangers or new situations" when compared to the group that does not belong to pages/groups on Facebook.

The conversation factor and social resourcefulness SSI refers to the initiation of behaviour and maintaining social interactions and social experience in the conversation [20]. The difference detected can be explained by the fact that activists end up developing a more spontaneous form of social communication as they seek to follow their beliefs and feelings in order to effect social change.

The factor of self-exposure to unknown or new situations includes approach to unknown persons [20]. Activists at the outset, are willing to face all odds to defend the cause they believe in, even knowing

what they intend to defend the action places them automatically in unexpected, new and unknown situations, showing that they are able to deal with own adversities of human society. These results support the theory Clary and Snyder [32] which states that the activists have many benefits, including strengthening their values, knowledge of new people and establish new friendships, increased self-esteem and the acquisition of new skills and abilities.

The results also reveal that those who support social causes offline ($n = 134$) present greater ability in the self-exposure factor to unknown or new situations. Those who support online causes ($n = 96$), as well as better ability in the aforementioned factor, also show a better ability in conversation and social skills. Analysing the group that supports online social causes ($n = 96$) and the group that does not support online social causes ($n = 114$) were found statistically significant differences that may reveal that individuals who support online causes, as well as better ability to approach online causes, unknown people, exhibited even better ability in the factor corresponding to conversation and social skills.

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