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Profiles of Political Cyberactivism among University Students in Chile: Repertoires and Patterns of Digital Participation

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Abstract

Political cyberactivism has broadened the repertoires of youth participation, but its internal configuration among university students in Latin America remains poorly described empirically. This study characterizes profiles of political cyberactivism among students at Chilean state universities and analyzes how these profiles relate to dimensions of socio-digital inequality, educational trajectories, and willingness to act offline. A cross-sectional survey was carried out to 905 students from seven state universities. Political cyberactivism was measured using a nine-item subscale of online political activism, organized into three theoretical dimensions: institutional participation (relationship with formal actors and channels), non-institutional or activist participation (denunciation, protest, and engagement), and communitarian participation (collective coordination, volunteering, and mutual support). A confirmatory factor analysis supported this three-factor structure. Based on the scores in these dimensions, a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was estimated, evaluating models of two to eight classes using BIC, CAIC, and entropy, then the profiles were described using sociodemographic variables (sex, geographic macro-region, area of study, socioeconomic level), digital access markers (primary connection device), and predisposition to offline political action. The four-profile solution presented the best balance between statistical fit and substantive interpretability. The first profile corresponds to network-bound cyberactivism: sustained online political participation, but with low in-person engagement. The second profile reflects integrated cyberactivism: high simultaneous engagement in institutional, activist, and communitarian dimensions, along with a greater predisposition to act offline. The third profile expresses selective cyberactivism: an emphasis on digital denunciation and confrontation, supported by advanced digital skills, but with less institutional and communitarian engagement. The fourth profile shows low digital political engagement in all measured dimensions. The profiles differ by gender, field of study, macro-region, and type of device, indicating that student political cyberactivism is heterogeneous and stratified, rather than homogeneous, and that digital competence alone does not guarantee sustained political mobilization.

Introduction

In recent years, the Chilean context has been characterized by deep democratic unrest, expressed in citizen disaffection (Navarrete, 2021; Díaz and Rocha, 2024), low trust in representative institutions (Madge and Rauld, 2022), and marked dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy, with young people and students appearing among the most critical groups (Latinobarómetro, 2024). Although the majority continues to value democracy as the best possible system, surveys reveal that only a minority declares itself satisfied with its current performance, especially among younger people, who perceive Congress and political parties as entities detached from their interests and lacking legitimacy (Bivort and Martínez-Labrín, 2023; Villalobos et al., 2021;).

In this context, the rise of university cyberactivism is not merely a manifestation of generational digitalization, but can be understood as an active response to the deficits in representation and participation within the traditional democratic system (Candón-Mena and Montero-Sánchez, 2021;

Cerva-Cerna, 2021; Torres and Suárez-Cao, 2023). Therefore, young people and students position themselves both as agents of change, experimenting with and leading new forms of action, and as subjects who resent and confront the limitations of the system, perceptions of social inequality and injustice, and the struggles for gender equality and equity, among other issues, channeling their discontent through digital repertoires that often challenge or overflow conventional institutional channels (Merino and Jara, 2022; Pila and Estrada, 2023; Solano, 2025).

Despite certain institutional and regulatory advances in recent decades, such as the political reform of law 21,654 of the year 2024, chilean society continues to suffer from profound structural inequalities, political exclusion, and a persistent distance between citizens and formal representative institutions (Quinteros and Cortés, 2023; Suárez-Cao, 2021; Suing and Marín-Gutiérrez, 2023). This situation has fostered the emergence and experimentation of new avenues for participation, organization, and protest, particularly within universities, that transcend the traditional channels of collective action (Betancor et al., 2024; Garrido-Castillo et al., 2024). Political cyberactivism emerges as a key strategy through which students and youth confront restrictions, rethinking their methods of political influence in response to the feelings and social unrest of the democratic system, as well as the limits of institutional intermediation for improving the quality of life and reducing social injustice (Author, 2021).

In this context, it should be borne in mind that today, two out of every three people in the world access the internet, with more than 5.4 billion active social media profiles globally, a figure that reflects sustained growth of 5% compared to the previous year (Fernández, 2022; We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2025). In Latin America, around 367.4 million people are connected to social media platforms, spending an average of 214 minutes a day using them, with Facebook being the predominant network in most countries, although in certain regions, such as Mexico, messaging services like WhatsApp are more relevant (Statista, 2022). This massive and growing digital interaction creates a key space for cyberactivism among university students, who use these platforms to organize, stay informed, and express their political and social demands. Particularly, in Chile connectivity reaches 67.4% of households and there are 22.8 million mobile users, figures that attest to a sustained increase in the last decade and consolidate an environment conducive to active digital participation and online political activism (SUBTEL, 2025).

In this global, regional, and local context, cyberactivism among university students is influenced by these trends, given the massive and constant interaction with social networks that configure spaces for expression, organization, and digital political mobilization. On the one hand, social interactions are being reconfigured, increasingly immersed in the digital space (Castells, 1996; Van Dijk and Hacker, 2018; Vromen et al., 2016), and on the other hand, the repertoires of forms of participation mediated by the network are expanding (Theocharis and Van Deth, 2017). In this regard, the generation of students who led the nationwide protests that brought the country to a standstill in October 2019, known as the social uprising, first mobilized during their secondary school years and later as university students, finding in the internet a crucial space for political organization and action (Jiménez-Yáñez, 2020). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with their entry into higher education, deepened this shift, turning

digital platforms not into an auxiliary resource, but into the only possible means of political participation, mobilization and deliberation (Barbour et al., 2020; Rivera-Aguilera et al., 2021).

The university community is established as a strategic context for analyzing political activism in Chile, given that young people at this stage of life undergo crucial processes of identity formation, increased social awareness, and disposition towards political commitment (Donoso and von Bülow, 2017; Kruglanski et al., 2019). These characteristics make their participation central to social mobilizations, transforming them into privileged actors for expressing and channeling political demands. In the Chilean context, this relevance has materialized over the last few decades, with emblematic events that have shaped the public agenda, such as the 2001 "backpack protest," the 2006 "penguin revolution," the 2011 student movement, and the feminist and anti-social inequality protests during 2017–2019 (Bellei et al., 2010; Borri, 2016; Cox et al., 2024).

In relation to the above, the university setting is strengthening its role as a key space for the development of political debate, articulation, and collective action. It is also characterized by a horizontal organizational structure, autonomy from traditional political parties, and a significant use of social media to promote debate and various forms of cyberactivism (Borri, 2016; Cárdenas, 2016; Castells, 2012). In this sense, the transition from in-person mobilization to cyberactivism does not imply a rupture, but rather an evolution of student action repertoires, where youth identity and agency are channeled and reconfigured in the digital environment.

Therefore, public universities, historically key players in the Chilean student movement, have consolidated their position as spaces for discussion and protest that now also extend to the digital environment (Dorbecker, 2013; Pis and Seia, 2022). This transition to cyberactivism has transformed the ways in which young people engage in political action, combining repertoires inherited from in-person mobilization with new modalities of online participation. Recent studies also show that these practices are not homogeneous, as they vary according to gender, disciplinary field, and socioeconomic background (Heger and Hoffman, 2021; Mariscal et al., 2019; Oser et al., 2013).

Thus, throughout most recent years, different conceptualizations have emerged to understand political participation via the Internet. Central to this work is the view of participation as the active engagement of individuals in society and politics through the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet and social media (Author, 2022).

From this perspective, digital participation in a broad sense encompasses other types of political coordination and interaction that differ from those of traditional organizations (Castells, 1996; Author, 2022; Robles, 2009; Torres-Gastelú, et al., 2019). In this regard, empirical evidence points to a positive relationship between forms of offline political action and online political participation (Boulianne, 2020; Theocaris and Van Deth, 2018). In this sense, and broken down by gender, some studies show that men are more politically active online than women (Heger and Hoffman, 2021; Mariscal et al., 2019). In Europe, evidence shows that, in general terms, older people tend to participate more in formal political

activities through digital platforms than young people, who instead often opt for more informal or alternative forms of online political participation (Van Dijk and Hacker, 2018).

On the other hand, research such as that conducted by Oser et al. (2013) has shown that political participation in the digital environment varies significantly according to people's socioeconomic background. In their study conducted in the United States, they found that young people with higher socioeconomic status tend to be more actively engaged in online political activities than those from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. This phenomenon is related to the characteristics of internet communication, which allows for greater interactivity, diversity and flexibility, fostering more authentic and equitable spaces for dialogue for actors who are heterogeneous in terms of gender, age and ethnicity (Mossberger et al., 2017; Jiménez, 2016). Furthermore, internet use is associated with new forms of participation in political processes and in the production of public value, thus broadening the spectrum of digital democracy (MacLean and Titah, 2022; Morduchowicz, 2020; Santana and Serra, 2022).

In this context, the emergence and persistence of phenomena such as university cyberactivism are inserted into a prolonged crisis of legitimacy and democratic representation in Chile, marked by citizen disaffection, distrust of institutions, and a widespread perception of a lack of effective access to political and social rights (Vásquez, 2022). New forms of student protest and digital participation not only expand the repertoire of action, but also manifest the search for alternatives to the perceived limits of the democratic system and its traditional channels of intermediation. Thus, university cyberactivism profiles not only reflect socio-digital inequalities, but also ways of confronting and re-signifying their own tensions amid climates of democratic erosion (Del Tronco and Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2020).

Political Participation on the Internet and Cyberactivism

Cyberactivism has been defined as the transfer of unconventional forms of political action to the digital space, taking advantage of information and communication technologies to articulate new forms of protest and collective organization (Author, 2012). Far from being understood solely as an instrumental resource, cyberactivism configures practices that expand the frontiers of political participation, creating repertoires of action that combine the legacy of social movements with the possibilities of digital networks. Its development is embedded in theoretical debates between those who argue that ICTs have the capacity to mobilize new social actors and those who maintain that they are more likely to reinforce pre-existing patterns of political engagement (Norris, 2002).

The study of cyberactivism allows us to problematize how the digital realm is not a neutral space, but rather a territory where power relations, collective identities and forms of political agency are negotiated (Castells, 2012). Movements such as the Arab Spring, 15M in Spain, and #Chiledespertó have shown that social networks function as platforms for horizontal, decentralized, and transnational organization, with an unprecedented capacity to challenge authoritarian regimes or neoliberal models (Castells, 2012; Author, 2012). In this sense, cyberactivism not only extends face-to-face struggles into virtual space, but

also enables its own forms of political action, which could hardly be explained outside of the online logic.

Within studies on digital participation, cyberactivism appears as a key category of analysis within what some authors have termed digital citizenship (Choi, 2017; Emejulu and McGregor, 2019; Author, 2018; Theocharis and Van Deth, 2018). However, more than being limited to normative competencies in the use of technologies, cyberactivism as a component within a broader category such as Digital Citizenship brings to the forefront the concrete practices of young people and groups who contest meanings of the public field and expand the democratic repertoire online (McCaughey and Ayers, 2003). Following a critical reading of digital citizenship, not as a set of skills, but as political praxis oriented towards social justice, this study approaches university cyberactivism as a repertoire that disputes meanings of the public field and broadens the democratic horizon online (Emejulu and McGregor, 2019; Zaunseder, Woodman and Emejulu, 2021). Hence, it is essential to analyze it from a critical perspective that highlights socio-digital inequalities present across gender, class and territory. This applies not only to internet access and digital skills (Ragnedda and Muschert, 2017), but also in terms of the opportunities and outcomes of converting digital action into transformative political participation.

Thus, based on the above background, this study aims to analyze different profiles of political cyberactivism among university students in Chile, in order to determine both different patterns of political participation on the Internet, as well as the sociodemographic characteristics associated with each of these.

Method

Design

The present study employed a transversal design with a quantitative focus, applying clustering techniques to find latent clusters in the data provided by the participants regarding their cyberactivism practices. In particular, a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was performed on standardized continuous indicators. Subsequently, the identified profiles were characterized both internally, by comparing the scores of each subscale that comprised them, and externally with sociodemographic characteristics according to belonging.

Participants

Study participants were selected using non-probability sampling and included students from the country's four macro-regions: North, Center, South and Austral South. The inclusion criterion was to be enrolled in an undergraduate program at a Chilean state university. The sample consisted of 905 university students, all of whom were enrolled at the time of responding to the instrument, from seven Chilean state universities. The average age of participants was 22 years old, and they belonged to various areas of study. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the participants. At a technical level, this sample size meets the standards for performing a Latent Profile Analysis, considering a total size close

to N = 500, which allows to identify with sufficient precision of the correct number of profiles in typical scenarios (Spurk et al., 2020), as well as ensuring N = 20–30 cases per expected subgroup to obtain minimally stable estimates within each profile (Dalmaijer et al., 2022).

Table 1
Characterization of participants

Characteristic	%
Sex	
Men	41.3
Women	59.7
Zone	
North	22.5
Center	55.6
South	22.2
Austral South	3.2
Study Area	
Technologies	16
Health	1.8
Humanities	1.3
Education	13.4
Law	11.9
Social Sciences	39.7
Sciences	1.4
Art and Architecture	6.9
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing	2.1
Administration and Business	5.3
Socioeconomic level	
High	2.5
Medium high	22.0
Medium	62.9
Medium low	11.0
Low	1.5
Internet access	

Characteristic	%
Sex	
Yes	96.7
No	3.3
Main device	
Cellphone	
Laptop	
Tablet	
Desktop	
Years using the Internet (M)	10.7

M = Mean; % = Percentage.

Procedure

The study was conducted in three phases: 1) To recruit the sample, seven Chilean state universities distributed throughout the country were contacted. The invitation criterion was to group the largest proportion of students in their respective areas. Once the authorization from the corresponding administrators was obtained, the application of the instruments was coordinated. Students accessed the questionnaire through the QuestionPro platform via links distributed to their institutional emails and social media. Upon entering the platform, participants were presented with an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the anonymous processing of their responses, and the intended academic use of the data. Only those who agreed electronically and wrote their acceptance of participation proceeded to the questionnaire. Participants were informed that no identifying information would be collected, that their anonymity was fully guaranteed, and that no risks were associated with their participation. This protocol was approved by the Scientific Ethics Committee of the Universidad de La Frontera (protocol code 140_23) on September 22, 2023. The data collection process lasted from November 2023 to October 2024. The instruments were completed by participants in approximately 14 minutes. A second phase, after finishing the collection and processing of the data, was evaluating the psychometric properties and reliability of the data collection instruments. 3) Finally, a latent profile analysis was performed on the data obtained to identify different cyberactivism profiles.

Instruments

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

This instrument contains closed-ended questions: sex, age, origin (urban/rural), primary device used for internet use, hours of use per week, and self-perceived socioeconomic status.

Internet Skills Scale

This instrument measures a wide range of internet skills. This range includes simple operational and navigation skills, as well as skills associated with internet creativity. The scale was originally developed by Van Deursen et al. (2017) and is composed of 35 items distributed across four factors: 1) Operational Skills, 2) Navigation Skills, 3) Social Skills, and 4) Creative Skills. For the present study, the short version of this validated scale was applied, translated and validated in Chile by Author et al. (2025), which includes 20 items. The response options are provided on a Likert-type scale with a 5-point response range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Online Political Activism Subscale

This instrument is part of the Digital Citizenship scale and measures young adults' willingness to participate politically in online communities. For this study, the Chilean version (Author et al., 2025) was used, adapted to the context of university students. This subscale is composed of 9 items, each representing a practice, and for the purposes of this study, they were grouped into 3 types of practices according to Van Deth's (2014) typology of political participation: 1) Institutional, 2) Non-institutional, and 3) Communitarian. Response options are provided on a Likert-type scale with a 5-point response range, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

University Political Action Tendencies Scale

The University Political Action Tendencies Scale was designed in Chile by Sandoval et al., (2018), and it’s theoretically based on Tausch (2011), who identifies different types of collective action; as well as different definitions of conventional and unconventional politics. The scale is composed of 12 items distributed across 3 factors: 1) Normative Political Action, 2) Non-Normative Political Action, and 3) Organized Political Action. The Cronbach's alpha for the instrument in its original evaluation was 0.82. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis Plan

After the data recollection, a matrix was created with the answers of the participants. Th software SPSS v22 was used to sort and filter the information, retaining only complete responses. Subsequently, the overall scores and ordinal alpha were then calculated to evaluate the reliability of each scale.

For the purposes of profile construction and to facilitate subsequent interpretation, a measurement model was evaluated and applied to the nine statements of the Internet Political Activism subscale. The evaluated model specified three factors consistent with Van Deth's (2014) typology of political participation, which considers three types of political participation: 1) Institutional, 2) Non-institutional, and 3) Communitarian, in this case applied to internet-measured practices. Each item in the subscale was assigned to a theoretically corresponding factor, so that the resulting structure reflected these three types of political participation. Thus, factor 1 accounts for institutional political participation practices, referring to participants' ties to formal arenas of engagement in public affairs. In this case, the items included were: 1) Contact with the government via the internet on issues that concern or interest me. 2) I attend student assemblies, political meetings, or public forums convened via social media or the internet. 3) I sign official forms about political, social, cultural, and economic issues online. On the other hand, factor 2 considers the practices associated with non-institutional political activism that encompasses repertoires of mobilization. This factor includes statements such as: 1) I belong to online groups that are engaged in political or social issues. 2) I use the internet to participate in social or protest movements. 3) I am more socially or politically engaged online than in real life. Factor 3 of the model considered practices associated with the communitarian field of participation that captures grassroots action and collaboration. In this case, the following items were included: 7) I carry out volunteer activities for a social or political organization through the Internet. 8) I collaborate with others on the Internet to solve local, national, or global problems. 9) I organize petitions or collect signatures on social, cultural, political, or economic issues on the Internet.

This theoretical grouping was evaluated through a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using structural equation modeling to verify if the proposed factor structure yielded adequate fit indices. The CFA was performed using the R programming language (RCore Team, 2025), through the Lavaan package (Rosseel, 2025), and applied to the polychoric correlation matrix. The parameters were estimated using the unweighted least squares method (ULS). The ULS estimator minimizes the sum of the squares of the differences between the observed and reproduced correlation matrices to work with small samples and few factors to retain, while still obtaining appropriate estimates of the parameters and their level of error (Flora and Curran, 2004; Lloret-Segura et al., 2014).

The CFA models were evaluated with the following global fit indices: Satorra-Bentler chi-square (2001), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), square root mean residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). For the CFI and TLI indices, values greater than or equal to 0.95 were considered reasonable model fits, for SRMR values less than 0.08, and for RMSEA values less than 0.06 (Brown and Moore, 2012).

Once the factor structure of the instrument was confirmed, a latent profile analysis was performed to identify cyberactivism profiles based on types of political participation: Institutional, Non-Institutional, and Communitarian (Van Deth, 2014). This analysis was conducted using RStudio software with the tidyLPA package (Rosenberg et al., 2018). In this case, for continuous data, latent profile analysis is preferable to other analytical strategies because it directly models the metric distribution of the

indicators, avoiding the loss of information and the bias caused by cut-off points introduced to discretize variables in other analytical techniques, such as latent class analysis. In LPA latent profile analysis, profiles are characterized by mean patterns in continuous indicators, which improves power, parsimony, and interpretability (Bauer and Curran, 2004).

Initially, the participants were grouped according to their scores obtained on each factor of the subscale. The selection of the number of profiles was based on the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and Consistent Akaike's Information Criterion (CAIC), favoring lower values as a better fit (Nylund et al. 2007; Vermunt and Magidson, 2002); in addition, model entropy, substantive coherence, theoretical interpretability, and minimum class size (≥ 5% of the total) were considered as tie-breaking criteria.

Secondly, the political cyberactivism profiles identified in the resulting model were characterized through comparative hypothesis testing. To describe the characteristics associated with these profiles, both internally (types of participation) and externally (sociodemographic context), hypothesis contrast tests were employed. Pearson's chi-squared test was used for discrete variables, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) for continuous variables. Levene's statistics were used for the purposes of identifying homogeneous and non-homogeneous variances in continuous variables. Since these variables exhibited non-homogeneous variances, Dunnett's T3 ($p < 0.001$) multiple comparisons test was applied.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Instrument Reliability

With the complete study sample (N = 905), the measurement model was evaluated considering the proposed factor structure, from the theoretical approach of political participation of Van Deth's (2014), the 9 items of the subscale were grouped into three types of political participation: 1) Institutional, 2) Non-Institutional, and 3) Communitarian. The results of the analysis indicate that the evaluated model presents adequate goodness-of-fit indicators for retention. See Table 2.

Table 2
Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Model	χ2 S-B	df	χ2/df	TLI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
Model of three correlated factors	45.3	12	3.77	0.971	0.975	0.12	0.055

Once the factor structure of the scale was confirmed, and due to the ordinal nature of the data, ordinal alpha (Elosua and Zumbo, 2008) was considered for the reliability analysis of the instrument. The result indicated a value of 0.917 for the online political activism subscale.

Identification of Latent Profiles

A Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was conducted to identify distinct patterns of political cyberactivism among university students, based on the three dimensions of online political participation (institutional,

non-institutional, and communitarian). This procedure included the initial estimation of models in between 2 and 8 classes using scores for each factor, and the comparison of fit indicators. The four-profile model showed the best overall performance, with the lowest BIC and CAIC (BIC = 5,918.63; CAIC = 5,795.22), along with high entropy (0.9131), and was thus retained as the most parsimonious and substantively interpretable solution. Table 3 shows the results for all evaluated models.

Table 3
Summary of latent profile cluster models

Model	LL	*BIC*	CAIC	AIC	ENTROPY
2 – cluster	-3,124.34	6,343.99	6,357.99	6,277.15	0.8053
3 – cluster	-3,011.02	6,144.59	6,162.59	6,058.02	0.8423
4 - cluster	-2970.02	5,918.63	5,795.22	5,693.62	0.9131
5- cluster	-2,870.81	5,945.86	5,905.86	5,710.92	0.8187
6- cluster	-2,820.09	5,971.65	5,975.65	5,801.62	0.8184
7 - cluster	-2,870.81	6,089.82	6,111.82	5,985.19	0.8348
8 - cluster	-2,709.17	6,676.54	6,686.54	6,628.70	0.8080

Once the latent class model with the best goodness-of-fit indicators was selected, the retained profiles were described according to the scores that make up the model (see Fig. 1), in addition to variables associated with internet-mediated participation and sociodemographic characteristics.

Characterization of Latent Profiles

Profile 1: Political cyberactivism encapsulated online (31.71%)

Profile 1 exhibits intermediate levels across the three dimensions of political cyberactivism: institutional political participation (m = 2.078), non-institutional participation (m = 2.436), and communitarian political participation (m = 2.453). This suggests a political engagement that is neither strictly formal nor overtly confrontational, but rather practical and grassroots, articulated around concrete public issues and working with others online. Compared to the other profiles, this group shows a low predisposition toward political action offline (m = 3.284), suggesting that their repertoire of participation and mobilization tends to remain within the digital environment. In terms of digital skills, they report high levels of operational (m = 4.518) and social (m = 4.395) skills, suggesting technical proficiency to engage in online political action without necessarily requiring organized structures. This profile is predominantly composed of women (63.07%) and is concentrated in social science fields of study (36.93%), with mobile phone use as the primary device (89.20%). It is mainly distributed in the Central (49.48%) and Northern (28.92%) regions of the country, with a proportional overrepresentation in the latter.

Profile 2: Comprehensive political cyberactivism (28.18%).

Profile 2 exhibits the highest and most consistent scores across the three domains of political cyberactivism: institutional participation (m = 3.411), non-institutional/activist participation (m = 3.122), and communitarian participation (m = 2.963). This pattern suggests a broad repertoire that integrates contact with institutions, participation in protests, and collective coordination in networks. This profile also presents the strongest reported tendency toward offline political action (m = 4.348), indicating continuity between digital and in-person engagement. In terms of digital skills, the group maintains high levels, though not the highest, in all assessed categories (operational skills M = 4.420; social skills M = 4.318; creative skills M = 3.355), which suggest technological autonomy and the ability to produce content and organize mobilizations. This profile is composed of a similar proportion of women (63.50%) and men (36.50%), although according to the results of the chi-square test of association, neither women nor men are overrepresented in this profile. Geographically, it is concentrated in the Central region (65.49%) and shows the highest participation of Social Sciences students (48.24%). Additionally, its distribution by device remains predominantly mobile (83.53%), but with a greater relative presence of laptops (8.63%) and desktop (5.09%), which suggest more diversified access.

Profile 3: Selective Political Cyberactivism (5.75%)

Profile 3 is the smallest but still substantially relevant. It presents the lowest average score in institutional participation (m = 1.529) and a very low score in communitarian participation (m = 1.007), but maintains intermediate levels in the non-institutional dimension (m = 2.728), which suggest engagement more oriented toward protest or denunciation than toward formal channels or sustained collaborative work. This group does not reach the multi-channel articulation levels of Profile 2, but neither does it completely withdraw from the online political space. It stands out for reporting the highest digital skills of the group, particularly operational skills (m = 4.765) and social skills in digital environments (m = 4.680), along with high navigation skills (m = 4.376). Its tendency toward offline political action (m = 3.786) is moderate to high. This profile is overrepresented by women (69.23%) and has a visible presence in technology (21.15%) and health (13.46%) sectors, with high mobile phone use (84.62%) but also relatively high laptop use (13.46%). Geographically, it has a presence in the Central (59.62%) and Southern (21.15%) regions.

Profile 4: Low-engaged Political Cyberactivism (34.36%)

Profile 4 shows the lowest scores in digital political participation in two of the three dimensions evaluated: non-institutional/activist (m = 1.610) and communitarian (m = 1.005). This suggests a more distant stance toward explicit political action, especially in terms of mobilization or online communitarian collaboration. However, this distance does not imply digital exclusion: this profile exhibits high levels of online social skills (m = 4.538) and high operational skills (m = 4.689), along with lower creative skills (m = 3.143). Its disposition toward offline political action is comparable to that of Profile 1 (m = 3.322) and clearly lower than that of Profile 2. At the sociodemographic level, this profile has the highest proportion of men (45.34%) and is concentrated among students in technology fields

(24.76%) and law/political science fields (16.72%), with a lower relative weight of social sciences (22.19%). Geographically, it is distributed between the Central (51.45%) and Northern (24.44%) zones. This profile also presents the most diversified use of devices, with less exclusive dependence on mobile phones (77.49%) and a greater presence of laptops (15.76%) and desktop computers (5.46%).

Comparison of profiles in continuous variables

To compare the identified latent profiles of political cyberactivism, contrast hypothesis tests were conducted using analysis of variance, followed by post-hoc tests for each group. The identified profiles differed significantly across the three types of online political participation practices: institutional participation ($F = 301.40$, $p < 0.001$), non-institutional/activist participation ($F = 209.79$, $p < 0.001$), and communitarian participation ($F = 494.01$, $p < 0.001$). This pattern confirms that the profiles represent qualitatively distinct repertoires of digital political action, rather than variations in intensity of the same form of participation. Table 4 presents the average scores for each profile across these three dimensions.

Table 4
Average scores of political cyberactivism profiles (retained model) according to scores on the Internet political activism scale

	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 4	*F*	*p value*
Institutional	2.078	3.411	1.529	1.999	301.40	< 0.001
Non-Institutional	2.436a	3.122	2.728a	1.61	209.79	< 0.001
Communitarian	2.453	2.963	1.007b	1.005b	494.01	< 0.001
The profiles connected by the same letter do not show statistically significant differences in the indicated factor according to Dunnett's T3 multiple comparisons test						

Likewise, the groups differed in external variables not used to build the profiles: offline political action tendency ($F = 45.03$, $p < 0.001$), operational skills on the Internet ($F = 10.50$, $p < 0.001$), online social skills ($F = 9.89$, $p < 0.001$), creative skills ($F = 3.21$, $p = 0.022$) and, to a lesser extent, navigation skills ($F = 3.86$, $p = 0.009$); these comparisons were made using ANOVA with Dunnett T3 post hoc corrections when the variances were not homogeneous. Table 5 presents the average scores for each profile across these dimensions.

Table 5
Average scores for cyberactivism profiles (selected model) according to scores on the Internet political activism scale

	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 4	*F*	*p value*
Offline Political Action Tendency	3.284a	4.348	3.786	3.322a	45.03	< 0.001
Operational skills	4.518ac	4.420a	4.765bc	4.689b	10.50	< 0.001
Navigation Skills	4.096a	4.148a	4.376a	4.254a	3.86	0.009
Social Skills	4.395a	4.318a	4.680b	4.538b	9.89	< 0.001
Creative Skills	3.317ab	3.355a	3.200ab	3.143b	3.21	0.022
The profiles connected (horizontally) by the same letter do not show statistically significant differences in the indicated factor according to Dunnett's T3 multiple comparisons test						

Comparison of profiles according to categorical variables

With the purpose of establishing proportional associations and differences between profiles and relevant sociodemographic, territorial, and academic variables, the chi-square test of independence was applied to each contingency table. The assumptions (expected frequencies) were verified, and where appropriate, exact tests were used for 2×2 tables; p-values are reported, as well as the location of cells contributing most to associations was determined using adjusted residuals ($|z| > 2.0$), interpreted as relative over- or under-representation within each profile. Table 6 presents the percentage distribution by profile according to sex, macro-region, origin, preferred device, socioeconomic level, and area of study.

In sociodemographic terms, the profiles showed significant differences in sex ($p = 0.004$), geographical area ($p = 0.003$), type of main connection device ($p = 0.025$) and study area ($p = 0.000$), while no statistically significant differences were observed in urban/rural origin ($p = 0.581$) or in socioeconomic level ($p = 0.107$); the specific contribution of each cell was evaluated using adjusted residuals.

Overall, these results support the existence of four substantially different profiles of cyberactivism in university students and allow their description both in terms of repertoires of digital political action and structural conditions of access and use.

Table 6
Sociodemographic characteristics, technological access and area of study according to cyberactivism profile (%)

		Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 4	*p value*
Sex	Woman	63.07	63.50	**69.23**	54.66	.004
	Man	36.93	36.50	30.77	**45.34**	
Zone	North	**28.92**	*14.51*	15.38	24.44	.003
	Center	49.48	**65.49**	59.62	51.45	
	South	19.16	16.08	21.15	20.90	
	Austral south	2.44	3.92	3.85	3.22	
Origin	Urban	87.11	89.02	92.31	90.03	0.581
	Rural	12.89	10.98	7.69	9.97	
Preferred device for use	Cellphone	89.20	83.53	84.62	77.49	0.025
	Laptop	*5.92*	8.63	13.46	**15.76**	
	Tablet	2.09	2.75	0.00	1.29	
	Desktop	2.79	5.09	1.92	5.46	
Socioeconomic level	High	3.15	1.57	1.92	2.89	0.107
	Medium-high	20.28	21.96	17.31	24.44	
	Medium	68.18	61.96	71.15	57.56	
	Medium-low	7.69	11.37	9.62	13.83	
	Low	0.70	**3.14**	0.00	1.29	
Study area	Technologies	15.33	*11.37*	21.15	**24.76**	.000
	Health	5.57	5.88	13.46	**11.90**	
	Education	14.63	11.37	9.62	12.86	
	Law	11.15	10.20	7.69	**16.72**	
	Social Sciences	36.93	**48.24**	36.54	*22.19*	
	Art and Architecture	5.92	7.45	3.85	3.86	
	Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing	4.53	1.18	0	2.57	

		Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 4	*p value*
	Administration and Business	5.92	4.31	7.69	5.14	

p-values obtained from the χ^2 test. Values in bold represent a statistically high proportion (%) of cases in the profile, indicated by adjusted residuals > 2.0. Values in italics represent a statistically low proportion.

Discussion

This research aimed to identify and describe distinct profiles of political cyberactivism among students at Chilean state universities, linking these online action patterns with sociodemographic variables associated with socio-digital inequalities. For this, a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was conducted using participants' scores on three dimensions of internet-mediated political participation: 1) institutional participation, 2) non-institutional participation, and 3) communitarian participation, derived from Van Deth's typology (2014). Subsequently, these profiles were characterized externally and comparatively through sociodemographic indicators, field of study, geographic location, digital skills, and a tendency toward offline political action. This design allowed for mapping repertoires of digital participation, in addition to situating them within the material conditions that enable or restrict students' political action.

Statistically, the selection of the four-profile model was sustained on both technically valid criteria (better overall fit indicators, lower BIC and CAIC, high entropy) and its substantive interpretability. The retained solution distinguished repertoires that do not correspond to merely gradual differences, but rather to qualitatively distinct configurations of digital political action. This aligns with the literature that argues that contemporary youth activism is not homogeneous but rather displays plural modes of engagement that combine protest, community management, and institutional negotiation, especially in contexts of democratic representation crises (Candón-Mena and Montero-Sánchez, 2021; Suárez-Cao et al., 2021). From this perspective, our results support the idea that student ciberactivism does not operate as one unique generational bloc, but rather as one heterogeneous field where more institutionalized, more confrontational, more community-based, and also more restrained forms of action coexist.

Each of the four identified profiles offered a distinct interpretive key to understanding how university students are politically processing their online presence. Profile 2 (“comprehensive political cyberactivism”) showed the highest and most consistent engagement across the three dimensions of digital participation, as well as the greatest predisposition to engage politically offline. This group embodies a multichannel form of politicization: it combines contact with institutions, grassroots organizing, and protest tactics, successfully articulating them in both digital and physical spaces. It could be interpreted as the clearest expression of a youth citizenry that is actively engaged in protest but also strategically embedded in the public field. Profile 1 (“political cyberactivism encapsulated online”) reveals a sustained digital participation in institutional and communitarian actions, but with limited impact beyond the online environment. Here, politics is practiced, but it remains online. This is relevant

because it suggests that discontent and stances are being taken, but they don't always escalate to forms of in-person disruption, which aligns with approaches that describe modes of political engagement mediated by social networks as spaces for expression and coordination that don't necessarily translate into direct material action (seek citation). Profile 3 (“selective political cyberactivism”), although a minority group, is substantially key because it emphasizes digital protest and denunciation, with little institutional or communitarian articulation, while simultaneously registering the highest levels of digital skills. This suggests a repertoire focused on specific disruptions of high symbolic intensity, sustained by advanced digital competencies. Finally, Profile 4 (“low-engaged political cyberactivism”) shows low levels of digital political participation in activist and communitarian dimensions, despite possessing high technical skills. This finding challenges the idea that more digital skills automatically imply more political agency, (Buchi, 2018) here technical competence is observed without necessarily sustained political mobilization.

The results also show that these configurations of political cyberactivism are not randomly distributed among the student body, but rather are associated with characteristics that can be interpreted as socio-digital inequalities. First, the field of study emerges as a structuring axis (citations). Profiles with greater broad political engagement (e.g., Profile 2) have a high proportion of social science students, while profiles that are less politically articulated online (Profile 4) have more students from technology and law fields. This suggests that digital action repertoires are also anchored in disciplinary frameworks of political socialization: the social sciences tend to produce students with greater discursive and organizational density regarding the public field, while technological fields seem to articulate a more instrumental or distant relationship with political conflict, even though they possess high levels of digital skills. Such differentiation resonates with previous findings that associate disciplinary and educational background with different ways of interpreting the political space and attributing agency within it, especially in public universities where historical politicization has been uneven across faculties (Cárdenas, 2016).

Second, differences by sex are observed. Women are overrepresented in politically active profiles, including profiles with repertoires of digital denunciation and communitarian action, which speaks to the recent trajectory of feminist student mobilizations in Chile and Latin America, where students have promoted agendas against gender violence, harassment and the precariousness of care work (Cerva-Cerna, 2021; Merino and Jara, 2022). However, a proportionally higher presence of men is also observed in the profile less politically engaged online, suggesting that the relative withdrawal of certain male sectors from digital conflict could be reproducing the shift of political confrontation towards other more traditional or institutionalized registers. At the geographical level, the study's results show overrepresentation in specific areas of the country according to the profile, which suggest that the macro-region not only organizes material conditions of access (connectivity, device availability), but also repertoires of collective action that respond to local histories of mobilization and conflict. This result aligns with the idea that socio-digital inequalities are not just a difference in bandwidth, but a territorial manifestation of historical processes of exclusion and political dispute (Suárez-Cao et al., 2021; Quinteros and Cortés, 2022). Regarding digital skills, it is observed that they do not operate as a single

threshold for political access. Although profiles with more multichannel activism show high levels of operational and social skills online, the least politically engaged profile also exhibits high technical competence. This confirms that digital competence is a necessary condition for participating politically online, but not a sufficient one. The difference these profiles suggest is not just "knowing how to do something," but "being willing to do something politically with that knowledge", that is, the articulation between digital skills and a critical disposition to dispute in the public field.

Finally, the relationship between digital political participation and predisposition to offline action offers relevant insights for understanding the role of state universities in Chile as spaces for student politicization. Profile 2, which integrates institutional, activist, and communitarian action online, also reports the greatest willingness to engage in political action offline. This finding supports the hypothesis of continuity between digital activism and in-person action: far from replacing street protest, digital platforms can function as political infrastructure to sustain, coordinate, and amplify in-person action (Claro et al., 2021; Boulianne, 2020; Rivera-Aguilera et al., 2021). In contrast, Profile 1 shows that it is possible to sustain significant political engagement online without necessarily transferring it to the physical space. Profile 3 suggests a form of focused disruption, closer to denunciation and visibility, which could operate as an “entry point” to political conflict for sectors that are highly digitally competent but less integrated into traditional organizational networks. Profile 4, on the other hand, warns that not all technological literacy leads to collective action: there is a group that masters the tools but does not necessarily recognize itself as a political actor. This distinction is central to university policy and public agendas because it indicates that strengthening technical skills does not guarantee critical digital citizenship or a sustained social mobilization (Author, 2021).

Regarding the study's limitations, it is identified that both the cross-sectional design and the use of self-response questionnaires prevent the establishment of a causal relationship between digital skills, gender, field of study, and repertoires of political participation. Secondly, the sample, although large and geographically distributed, comes from state universities and was obtained through non-probability sampling; consequently, the results cannot be generalized to the entire Chilean university system or to non-university youth. Thirdly, although the LPA allowed for the identification of statistically consistent profiles, these should not be interpreted as rigid or mutually exclusive categories in the daily lives of students. Rather, they are probable patterns of digital political articulation under specific structural conditions. These limitations open a direct line for future qualitative research that delves deeper into the repertoires of digital political action: how they are constructed, how they are experienced, how their costs are negotiated (including online gender-based violence), and how they connect (or not) with in-person mobilization in contexts of growing democratic disaffection and disputes over political representation in Chile (Vázquez, 2022; Del Tronco and Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2020).

Declarations

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidad de La Frontera (protocol code 140_23 and approved on 22 September 2023).

Informed Consent Statement: Participants accessed the questionnaire through the QuestionPro platform via a link distributed to their institutional email accounts and social media networks. Prior to starting the survey, all individuals were presented with an informed consent form, which clearly outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and how the data would be used. Consent was obtained in written form through the platform before any responses were recorded. The study was conducted anonymously. No identifying information was collected, and responses could not be linked back to individual participants at any stage.

AI Usage Statement

AI tools (ChatGPT) were used only for copy-editing purposes, to improve grammar and readability of text written by the authors. No content, analyses, interpretations, or ideas were generated by AI. All revisions were reviewed and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization, M.G.-C., J.F.-P., and P.C-M.; methodology, M.G.-C. and J.T.-A.; software, M.G.-C. and G.T.-T.; validation, M.G.-C., J.T.-A., G.T.-T, and C.B-O.; formal analysis, M.G.-C and J.F.-P..; investigation, M.G.-C., J.T.-A., and S.H.-O.; resources, M.G.-C. and J.T.-A.; data curation, M.G.-C and C.B-O.; writing—original draft preparation, M.G.-C., J.T.-A, and J.F.-P.; writing—review and editing G.T.-T, and P.C-M; visualization, P.C-M and S.H.-O.; supervision, J.T.-A. and J.F.-P.; project administration P.C-M and S.H.-O.; funding acquisition, M.G.-C. and J.T.-A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to ethical reasons.

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Figures

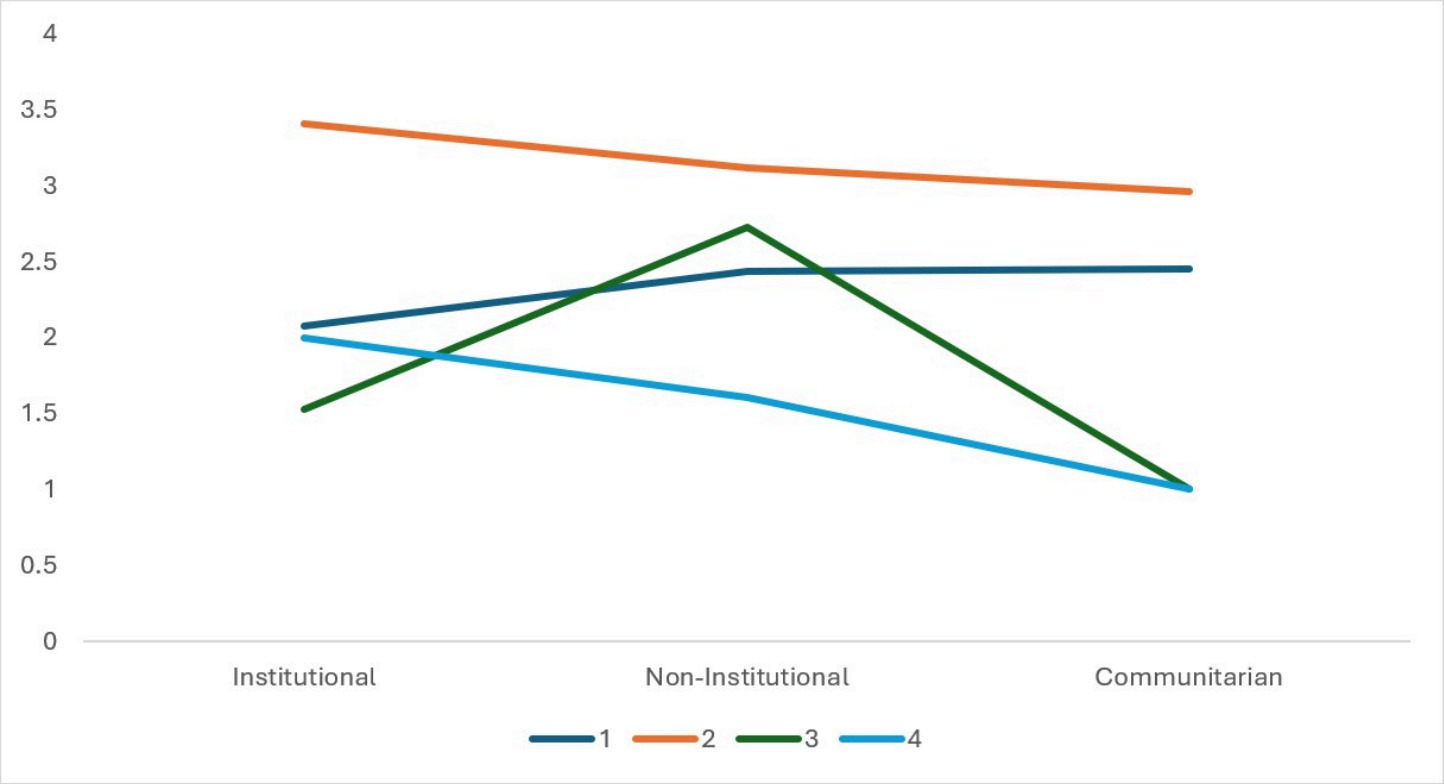


Figure 1

Profiles of political cyberactivism: means in institutional, non-institutional and communitarian participation by profile (1–4)