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Assessing Civic Engagement among University Students

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Abstract

Civic engagement is a multidimensional concept which includes attitudes and behaviors that promote active participation in social responsibility, democratic processes, and community welfare. Universities play an important part in promoting civic engagement by encouraging students to build healthy civic values and actively participate in society. Objectives: The current study was conducted to determine the mean difference between civic engagement attitudes and behaviors as well as to assess civic engagement and its dimensions among university students. Methods: A survey-based descriptive-comparative research design was used. The sample consisted of 123 students selected through simple random sampling from different departments of Chaudhary Charan Singh University Campus, Meerut, India. The Civic Engagement Scale, created by Doolittle and Faul (2013), was used for the data collection. Descriptive statistics and a paired-samples t-test were performed using SPSS for data analysis. Results: The results showed that while civic engagement behaviors were relatively modest ($M=28.98$, $SD=7.86$), participants showed a relatively high level of overall civic engagement ($M=72.15$, $SD=13.29$) and favorable civic engagement attitudes ($M=43.17$, $SD=7.29$). A statistically significant difference between civic engagement attitudes and behaviors was found using the paired-samples t-test ($t(122)=21.54$, $p<0.01$), with attitudes scoring significantly higher than behaviors. Conclusion: The findings suggest that although university students possess favorable attitudes toward civic engagement, these attitudes are not fully translated into corresponding civic behaviors. The study emphasizes how important it is for universities to offer worthwhile chances for community involvement, service-learning, and hands-on activities that support the conversion of favorable civic views into active civic engagement. These programs might help produce graduates who are civically and socially conscious.



Keywords: Civic Engagement, Attitudes, Behaviors, University Students

Introduction

Civic engagement among college students is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors, including cultural involvement, educational pathways, and societal influences. Research indicates that participation in cultural center activities significantly enhances civic engagement skills across diverse student identities, highlighting the institutional value of such centers in promoting civic involvement (Copeland et al., 2025). Civic engagement encompasses activities such as political participation, volunteering, advocacy, and initiatives aimed at advancing social justice and enhancing community welfare (Alcantar, 2022). Academic discourse sees civic engagement as a complex concept rather than a singular behavioral manifestation; it includes a range of political and social actions, attitudes, and competencies that create links between students and civic life as well as community service. The significance of civic knowledge, attitudes, and observable behaviors in the communal and political domains is emphasized by foundational definitions (Alcantar, 2022; Mac Labhrainn & McIlrath, 2016). Research also identifies institutional, individual, co-curricular, and curricular elements that either support or hinder student civic involvement; the effects of these factors vary depending on particular behaviors and demographic groupings. The relative importance of several high-impact techniques and the moderating effect of institutional setting and student backgrounds are highlighted by recent empirical studies (Ro et al., 2022; Nishishiba et al., 2005).

Civic habits are also influenced by educational experiences that foster social awareness. Research has shown that students who are more concerned about social justice and human rights are more likely to participate in community service, advocacy, and group projects. According to Kwon et al. (2020), human rights education increases students' propensity to actively engage in addressing social challenges, converting civic principles into significant civic activities. Additionally, service-learning has been found to be an effective method of instruction for fostering civic values in college students. Students gain improved interpersonal skills, a deeper commitment to social justice, a greater appreciation for diversity, and stronger leadership abilities through meaningful community engagement and reflective learning (Manning-Ouellette & Hemer, 2019).

Civic activities promote a commitment to the public good and a service-oriented mindset that universities strive to inculcate as essential outcomes for graduates (Arvanitidis, 2017). Civic engagement behaviors refer to the observable actions through which individuals contribute to their communities and participate in a democratic society. According to research, students' engagement in civic behaviors is greatly increased when educational experiences offer chances for community participation (Sessa et al., 2013). In a similar manner, stereotypes, direct interaction have been found among university community. Such experiences enable students to transform positive civic attitudes into concrete civic actions by fostering a deeper understanding of social issues and increasing their willingness to contribute to community welfare (Knecht & Martinez, 2012). Higher education research has placed a considerable amount of attention on the relationship between civic engagement attitudes and behaviors. Positive attitudes alone do not always translate into active civic action, even if they frequently encourage people to engage in civic activities. The shift from attitudes to behaviors depends upon opportunities for participation, institutional support, and meaningful engagement with community issues. Research continuously shows that educational interventions that integrate structured reflection with community service improve civic attitudes and actions at the same time (Celio et al., 2011).

Contemporary theoretical frameworks conceptualize civic engagement as a developmental and multidimensional competency influenced by cognitive, interpersonal, and identity-related advancements, drawing upon intercultural maturity paradigms within student developmental theory (Cloeren, 2010). Civic engagement attitudes form the psychological foundation that motivates individuals to engage in civic and democratic processes. According to research, students'

civic attitudes are enhanced significantly by taking part in educational and community service activities during their college years. This is because these programs increase students' feeling of responsibility, political knowledge, and dedication to community involvement (Metz & Youniss 2005).

Objectives

1. To assess the civic engagement and its dimensions among university students.
2. To examine the mean difference of civic engagement attitude and civic engagement behavior among university students.

Methodology

The current study adopts a descriptive-comparative research design. This study uses a survey method. This design is suitable because it allows measurement of naturally occurring variables without manipulation and helps in the description and comparison of the variables. The sample consists of 123 students from different departments of the Chaudhary Charan Singh University Campus, Meerut, India. The simple random sampling technique was used. Data were collected through standardized self-report Civic Engagement Scale developed by Doolittle and Faul (2013). The questionnaires were filled out with paper-pencil method by the participants. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses prior to data collection. The consent was also taken from the participants. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

Results

The descriptive analysis was done to see the mean value and standard deviation of the variables. The paired-sample t-test was done to compare the mean difference between civic engagement attitude and behavior.

Table 1: Description of the sample

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-20	68	55.3
21-23	47	38.2
24-28	8	6.5
Gender		
Male	79	64.2
Female	44	35.8

Table 1 shows the description of the sample included in the study. The study comprises participants from different age groups ranging from 18 years to 28 years of age. There are 68 participants (55.3%) in the 18-20 years age group, 47 participants (38.2%) in 21-23 years and 8 participants (6.5%) in 24-28 years of age. Furthermore, the sample includes 79 female participants (64.2%) and 44 male participants (35.8%).

Table 2: Description of the variables

Variables	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Civic Engagement	123	34	95	72.15	13.287
Attitudes	123	25	56	43.17	7.289
Behaviors	123	6	42	28.98	7.864

Table 2 represents the description of the variable civic engagement and its two dimensions, namely attitudes and behaviors. The minimum obtained score of civic engagement is 34 and the



maximum score is 95. The mean value of civic engagement is 72.15 and SD is 13.287, which shows that the students scored high on civic engagement. The minimum obtained score on attitudes is 25 and the maximum is 56. The mean value of attitudes toward civic engagement is 43.17 and SD is 7.289, this also shows that the participants have a highly positive attitude toward CE. The minimum secured score of behaviors is 6 and the maximum is 42. The mean score of behaviors is 28.98 and SD is 7.864, this shows that participants engage moderately in the civic behaviors.

Table 3: Comparison of Means of Attitudes and Behaviors (Paired Sample t-test)

		Mean	SD	Std. Error	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
		Mean					
Pair 1	Attitudes-Behaviors	14.195	7.308	0.659	21.543	122	

A paired sample t-test was done to examine the difference between attitudes and behaviors of the participants. Table 3 shows the results of the paired sample t-test. The table shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the attitudes and behaviors $t(122)=21.543$, $p<0.01$. The mean difference between the attitudes and behaviors is 14.195, indicating that the average attitude score is 14.195 points higher than the average behavior score. This finding suggests that although participants had a positive attitude toward civic responsibility, it was not fully reflected through their behaviors. Thus, the findings suggest that there exists a gap between the attitudes and behaviors toward civic responsibility among university students.

Conclusion

The present study examined the civic engagement and its dimensions among the university students. The participants showed a relatively high level of overall civic engagement and attitudes toward civic engagement, whereas their civic engagement behaviors were comparatively moderate. Furthermore, the paired sample t-test indicated a significant difference between the civic engagement attitudes and behaviors among participants. This significant difference suggests that the high positive attitudes do not always translate into civic behaviors. The results highlight that there exists a gap between the attitudes and behaviors; and emphasize that universities must encourage and create opportunities for students to engage in civic behaviors and community activities. Promotion of practical engagement along with positive attitudes may contribute to the development of responsible and socially active citizens.

Limitations

The current study relied solely on the self-report measurement of the variables, which sometimes can lead to social desirability. Future research can consider other methods such as observation or interview along with the self-report questionnaires.

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