In January 2012, in several cities of Romania, people turned out to streets to protest. The protests were linked to the wave of movements such as the Indignados or Occupy Wall Street. The students were especially visible among protesters. In this paper we evaluate who are the Romanians who take an active role in political life and what motivates them. Following several studies on political participation and protest, we assert that at the individual level the protests express their distrust of the political system that translates into engaging in demonstrations. Online activism accelerates the felling of shared distrust of institutions, motivating youth to engage in protest participation although the effects might be moderate. The hypotheses are tested with data from a general survey on participation in 2012 and a student survey from October 2012. We find that gender, distrust in institutions and family income influence protest behavior. Time spent online has a negative effect on protest engagement and online activism increases protesting.

Keywords: political participation, protest, students, online activism, internet, institutional trust

Introduction
On November 7, 2011, six activists that were vocal against the exploitation of gold mines in Rosia Montana by the Canadian Company Gold Corporation occupied the Continental Hotel, a deserted building placed in the center of Cluj, Romania. Protesters showed banners asking citizens to revolt against politicians that support the mining exploitation that could cause irreversible damage to the environment. The date was carefully chosen as a commemoration of the Russian revolution. The police reacted with brutality, removed by force the six protesters, jailed them, issued 2500 lei (600 euro) fines for each and initiated criminal prosecutions against the protesters. This is only one example of a longer series of protests taking place in 2011 and it describes perfectly the patterns of Romanian protesting: feeble and brutally repressed by authorities. Romanians tend to be much less involved in community life or protest less often than citizens in the neighboring Hungary or countries such as Poland and Czech Republic (Badescu, Sum and Uslaner, 2004). Yet, starting January 12, 2012, several thousands Romanians turned out to streets to protest, as a reaction to the governments’ attempts to reform the medical system. Raed Arafat the physician that implemented a successful emergency service system had a conflict of opinion with president Basescu regarding the privatization of health care system. This conflict led to the resignation of Raed Arafat as secretary of state in the Ministry of Health. In the evening of his resignation several hundreds of citizens turned out to protest in Targu Mures, the city where Raed Arafat was coming from. In the following days in Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara, Oradea, Constanta and Arad citizens joined the protests. Suddenly, the protest turned into a manifestation of discontent against politicians and political parties forcing the Boc government to resign on February 6, 2012. Romania did not experience such protests since 1990 when in Piata Universitatii thousands of students protested against the interim president Iliescu’s close connection to former nomenclatura. Unlike the protests in 1990 the ones in 2012 had fewer citizens. Some argue that there were no more than 10000 protesters in all Romania (Europafm.ro, 2012) while others say that in January 16 only in Bucharest there were 10000
people when the protesters from Piata Universitatii were joined by supporters of USL (The Social Liberal Union) the main opposition party (Libertatea.ro, 2012). Thus the magnitude of the protests was significantly smaller (Stoica and Mihailescu 2012) than the demonstrations in 1990 that were crushed by the miners’ intervention in Bucharest. Students joined the protests in Cluj, Bucharest and Targu Mures. (Realitatea.net, 2012). For students and most of the participants the Internet and Facebook played an important role. There were hundreds of blogs and sites such as indignati-va.ro, voxpublica.ro or criticatac.ro as well as Facebook events (https://www.facebook.com/events/207426876014642/) that called people to protest.

Claudiu Craciun (Stoica and Mihailescu, 2012) and Dinu Gutu (Gutu, 2012) protest organizers and participants in Bucharest, Bogdan Iancu and Adrian Dohotaru (Dohotaru 2012) protesters in Cluj related similar stories about how they found out about the protests and how they motivated citizens to turn out every day after January 16 by first attending Facebook events and later organizing Facebook events and pages.

The January events in 2012 replicated citizens’ frustrations with how democratic politics is functioning in Romania. Protester displayed variety of messages showing reasons for manifestation. Senior citizens protested against the reduction and taxation of pensions higher than 250 euro. The associations representing citizens who participated in the 1989 revolution protested against the cuts in benefits operated by the government. Students protested because of the underfinanced system of education. Other protested against president Basescu’s authoritarian character. There groups that protested against the Gold Corporations (see Mercea, 2012) plan to mine for gold in Rosia Montana while other claimed for a democratic system without political parties and politicians (Stoica and Mihailescu, 2012).

What determined Romanian citizens to turn out to protest after more than 20 years of apathy?

In this paper we focus on the effects of youth protest participation. We assert that the Internet is a medium of shared discontent that creates a favorable environment for protest participation. The first section clarifies the concept of political participation and explains how socio-demographic characteristics, Internet impacts participation of youth and students. The second section views the Internet as a medium favorable for collective rebellion. In the third section we discuss the methodology and data. The fourth section surveys the participatory practices of students compared to adults from Romania. Finally we explain and discuss protest participation of students looking at socio demographics, political engagement, values, time spent online and online activism.

Political Participation. Conceptual clarifications

Protest engagement is one form of political participation. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) define political participation as the “…activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action - either directly by affecting the making of or the implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those selections” (p. 38).

Forms of political participation include conventional forms such as voting, being involved in a political party and contacting a politicians and unconventional participation such as protest or participation in marches. Stoker (2006) classifies types of political participation according to its relation to the state. Institutional or “traditional” (Teocharis 2011) refers to conventional participation and extra institutional to participation that does not involve state institutions directly. Throughout the paper these concepts will interchangeably be used. Norris (2002) considers unconventional participation as a mainstream activity thus the term seems outdated.

However, for the Romanian context the political participation outside institutional frameworks is rare and practiced by few (Badescu, Sum and Uslaner, 2004).

Political participation is influenced by socio-economic status and education (Almond and Verba 1963, Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995). Among socio demographic variables
education was considered as particularly closely linked to political participation (Converse 1972, p. 315 and Putnam 2000 p. 168). Although these studies linked political participation to education at the individual level at the aggregate level the relationship between education and political participation becomes negative or inexist ent (Campbell, 2006). More recent studies revealed education is not a determinant but a proxy for political participation. Thus variables like parents’ socioeconomic status and family political discussions influence political participation. These determinants influence education neutralizing its effect on participation (Berinsky and Lenz 2011, Kam and Palmer 2008, Persson 2012).

The importance of gender is neutralized by systemic justifications of protest engagement (Jost et al. 2011). Men are considered to be more likely to engage in protest (Gurr, 1970, Hustinx 2012). Other studies do not show differences between males and females in terms of protest participation (Teocharis, 2011) or distrust (Carlín, 2011) although there is recent evidence in Romania that shows women as predominantly taking up activist roles in their community (Matzal, 2013).

The linkage between political attitudes and political participation was surveyed from the early research of Almond and Verba (1963). The direction of the causal arrow between political behavior and attitudes has not been yet established by researchers (Quintelier and Hooghe, 2012). Trust and ideological orientation were considered predictors of political participation (Machado, Scartascini and Tommasi, 2011, Putnam, 1993, 2000). Political trust is considered to be negatively correlated with political participation (Quintelier and Hooghe, 2012). On the other hand interpersonal trust is correlated positively with certain forms of political participation such as protest engagement (Machado, Scartascini and Tommasi, 2011). Ideological orientation is linked with political participation. In Western European countries leftism is associated with engagement in unconventional political participation or radicalism (Forland, Korsvik and Christophersen, 2010, Porta della, 2003) although the association of leftism with activism is not that clear (Duch and Strom, 2004).

There are several studies that link age to political participation (Beck and Jennings 1979, Melo and Stockemer, 2012, Nie, Verba and Kim 1974,). Initial research revealed a direct proportional relationship between age and political participation i.e. older generations engage more in political activities than youth with the exception of post war Germany (Almond et al. 2008). Apathy, disillusionment towards politics and lack of political participation are the terms characterizing youth behavior and attitudes towards polity. Hooghe (2004) explains that youth is not involved because they do not perceive that they have a stake in politics. Others (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000 and Putnam 2000) indicate that social capital has eroded leading to a decline the quality of democracy indicating the symptoms of systemic problems in modern democracies. Some see apathy and alienation as reasons for youth lack of political participation (Henn, Weinstein and Forrest, 2005, O’Neill, 2003 and O’Toole, 2003). Gauthier (2003) views the analysis of political orientation of youth as a litmus test of how democracy will look like in the future. For the above mentioned researchers the prospects for the democratic systems are bleak. With an apathetic and uninterested youth democracy will suffer in the future from problems of legitimacy and lack of people’s involvement in the democratic decision making.

The problems of youth involvement in politics focused firstly on their inability to participate to conventional forms of political participation such as voting or contacting a politician (O’Neill 2003, O’Toole 2003). Secondly there has been a discussion about the inappropriate tools for measuring political participation (Bennett, 2012, Deth Van Jan, 1986, Kalaycioglu and Turan, 1981, Keeter et al. 2002, Verba and Kim, 1978). These tools accentuate formal types of participation and rely less on the gamut of forms political participation embodies. Youth may employ forms of political participation not captured by survey questions (Gaiser, Rijke de Spannring, 2010 and Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010). Thirdly the lack of
involvement in political participatory acts is a sign of criticism of the performance of
democratic systems. (Norris 1999 and 2002) In this view youth pays attention to politics but it
is critical and probably disillusioned with the quality of political actors.
Recent research targeting youth political participation focused on alternative means of
participating with encouraging results. Gaiser, de Rijke and Spanning (2010) discovered that
youth manifest politically in various ways, and their level of participation depends on gender,
education and location. Riley, Morey and Griffin (2010) attributed political meanings to
informal activities such as club partying. Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti (2005) built a
“consumerism index” in order to highlight the boycotting and “buy-cotting” as phenomena
that belong to political participation. Quintelier and Hooghe (2012) emphasized the
socialization effect of collective political participation of youth.
This article examines the effect of the quantity and quality of time spent on Internet on
political protest on students. We will take into account the influence of parental education and
income, gender, level of institutional trust and ideological orientation on political protest
when we test the strength of the linkage between online activism and protest.
The next section relates political participation, internet use to youth behaviors and political
attitudes.

Political participation, internet and youth
“In this regard internet changes nothing” (p.780) asserted Margolis (2007) referring to the
internet as an inefficient tool for making citizens pay attention to politics. Following his line
of reasoning, Internet does not bring changes in the way we explain political behavior of
citizens. When the Internet became a widely used medium of communication, political
scientists saw it as a catalyst for improvement of the quality of democratic systems. Cyber-
optimists argued that this medium improves access to political information, enhances citizens’
say in who decides, what is decided and allows people to react and discuss the effects of
political decision making (Weber and Bergman, 2003). But, the research on the potential of
Internet to change democracy was suspected of technological determinism. Cyber-pessimists
argued that Internet would not bring changes to the way we perceive political participation
since the frequency of the political uses of the net is low (Margolis, 2007). Secondly
mainstream mass media and market took over the Internet as it was the case with television.
Thirdly the Internet created a digital divide between countries and within countries the more
affluent, males and young have more say in online politics (Margolis, 2007). It is no surprise
then that most studies on the effect of internet on political participation focused on youth. Our
study focuses on students online activities effects on offline protest participation. We will
show that the digital divide in Romania between students and other citizens is acute.
Studies (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen and Wollebaek, 2012) on social networking (the article of
Margolis was written before Facebook became an important application used by millions of
citizens), and research on the various political uses of Internet revealed that online activities
have positive effects on offline political participation (Bennett, 2012, Quintelier and Vissers,
Quintelier and Vissers (2008) distinguished the quantity of time spent on internet from the
quality of the activities performed online and discovered that although the time replacement
hypothesis was not verified by their data certain online activities had repercussions on offline
political participation. Bakker and de Vreese (2011) confirm these findings by showing that
media consumption online has positive effects on political participation.
The above mentioned authors found that the time spent on internet has negative or no effects
on political participation because it reduces the time spent for engaging in offline civic
activities. That is why in our research we assert that time spent on the internet will have a
negative effect on protest political participation.
The focus then turns on the quality of time spent on the Internet and its effects on different facets of political participation. Quintelier and Vissers (2008) showed that online petitioning has an effect on unconventional political participation. Bakker and Vreese (2011) revealed positive effects of online usage of media, online participation and offline political participation. Internet has beneficial effects on acquiring information about politics (Xenos and Moy, 2007).

We seek to differentiate among different forms of political participation that are associated with online activism. We claim that there is a positive relationship between online activism and protest participation. We differentiate protest participation from other forms of unconventional participation. Since the riots from Moldova in 2009, Iran in 2009, Kirghizstan in 2010, Northern African protests and regime changes of 2010, the Occupy Movement in 2011 and protests against ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Test Agreement) in 2012 the effects of modern information technologies on political protest participation seem to be important. The next section will discuss the intermingling of protest participation and online activism.

Protest political participation
Why do citizens engage in protests? There are four theories that explain why citizens engage in protests. Status inconsistency motivates protest by differences of social status between groups in society. According to this theory those that perceive status inequalities are most likely to engage in protest. Cumulative deprivation posits that economically deprived social groups will engage in protest participation yet socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are more likely to be withdrawn than politically active. Relative deprivation theory argues that perceived imbalances between groups generate social upheavals (Gurr, 1970). Finally social isolation theory posits that people who are isolated or marginalized by society are most likely to engage in protests; yet it is the people that are most active and involved seem to be more engaged political protests (Orum, 1974). Out of the four grand theories of protest participation, relative deprivation theory survived attributing psychological motivations to engagement in revolutions. There are other theories that explain protest participation. Orum (1974) identifies individual motivation, trust and a sense of political efficacy as determinants of protest participation. Others identify weak institutions as a determinant of engagement in alternative modes of participation that include protesting (Machado, Scartascini and Tommasi, 2011). Gurr (1970) explains that engaging in rebellious acts is associated with the level of “potential for collective violence” (p.8). This potential is an effect of the level of “shared discontent” and frustration among citizens. The “potential for political violence” is influenced by the level of shared discontent towards the political system (Gurr, 1970, p.8). The Internet represents the medium in which the process of discontent sharing spreads rapidly. Those exposed to this sharing-discontent-environment will be a public that accumulates a high potential for collective rebellious acts. Within this theoretical framework we assert that the internet is capable for activating young citizens, by sharing discontent. Our contribution to the theory explaining citizen rebellion is that we show that the Internet is a favorable medium for communicating discontent.

Political protest is a high risk and high cost endeavor. Some citizens have a tradition of activism in their family and engage in protests frequently. They are frequently members in non-governmental organizations. Besides tradition, period and context have an important role in activating protest participation (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). In periods of economic crisis, citizens are more likely to engage in protest participation. In several countries harsh economic measures led to widespread protests. The protests in Greece (Teocharis 2011) in Spain (Charnock, Purcell, Ribera-Fumaz 2012) or Lithuania (Woolfson, 2010) and Romania in 2012 were triggered by the political and economic context. In Lithuania protests were considered an outcome of disappointment generated by failures of market oriented economic policies.
(Woolfson, 2010). In Spain and Greece unemployment and politicians’ poor performance led to outbursts (Charnock, Purcell, Ribera-Fumaz 2012, Teocharis 2011). These conditions create an environment of distrust in politicians and political institutions (Carlin 2011). That is why we expect that there will be a negative relationship between trust and protest political participation.

Many of the protests are triggered by organizations that have the potential to create social movements. Several of the activists that engage in protest activities are already members of organizations (Corrigall-Brown, 2012, Felix, Gonzales and Ramirez 2008, Mercea 2011). Thus we intend to discover a positive association between membership in organizations and protest participation.

Occupy Now, Indignados and aganaktismenoi (outraged) were social movements that relied on the Internet as a medium for information and mobilization. In fact there is a rapidly developing literature on social movements and protests that link these forms of political participation with online activism and social networking (Biddix and Park, 2008, Earl, Jennifer and Kimport, Katrina 2011, Mercea, 2011, Pickerill 2004 and Teocharis 2011).

Earl and Kimport (2011) discern degrees of online activism: e-mobilization, e-tactics and e-movement. E-mobilization emphasizes that tools that encourage citizens to aggregate opinion, e-tactics refers to employing a mixture of offline and online methods while e-movement refers to protests that are taking place entirely online. Our research falls into the second type of internet activism.

Biddix and Park (2008) see the Internet as a tool for mobilization of citizens to participate in offline protests. Pickerill (2004) remarks that Internet usage creates advantages to organizations that employ ICT (information communication technology). Mercea (2011) differentiates between types of protest participation and types of activists. High risk protest requires affiliated activists to use online mobilization while low risk protests are associated with unaffiliated activist’ usage of Internet.

We are set to discover the entwinement of protest participation and online participation. The expectation is that online activism is positively associated with engaging in protests.

The hypotheses of this research are:

H1. There is a positive correlation between the level of education and income of parents on protest political participation.
H2. Participation in unconventional political acts (other forms than protest) has a positive effect on protest participation.
H3. Institutional trust has a negative effect on protest participation
H4. The time spent on internet has a negative effect on protest participation.
H5. Online activism has a positive effect on protest participation.

Uslaner (2004) attributed postmaterialist values to the few Romanians who get engaged. Benson and Rochon (2004) found a positive connection between postmaterialism, interpersonal trust and protest participation while Heunks (1991) found a positive relationship between postmaterialist values, protest engagement, leftism and youth. Finally Teocharis (2011) linked postmaterialist values to extrainstitutional participation, protest engagement and online activism. Several other studies confirmed the existence of a correspondence between youth postmaterialist attitudes and protest participation (Cantijoch and Martin, 2009, Kim, 2007, Opp, 1990, Roberts, 2006). Our study that focuses on students’ political engagement will provide an indirect test of the manifestation of these values. We do not intend to address directly the link between postmaterialism and protest participation. Yet we are set to develop
an analysis of the correlation between participation and online activism of the group most likely to have post materialist values.
We test out these hypotheses with a 2012 nationally representative survey and a 2012 student survey in Romania. The next section will present a short history of protest in Romania and a description of the context in which the 2012 protests occurred.

A Short History of Protests in Romania

Compared to other countries in Eastern Europe in Romania during communism there were very few instances of protests. There were two notable events. First there was the spontaneous revolt of the miners in Jiu Valley in 1977 in which 35000 miners protested against worsening working conditions (Cesereanu, 2004). Nicolae Ceausescu, the communist leader at that time, promised to fulfill everything the miners requested. In reality from 1977 the Jiu Valley area was isolated from other parts of Romania, the heads of protesters were jailed and an intense indoctrination process preventing protest outbursts.

Cumulative poverty sparked the second revolt under communism in 1987. Food, electricity and hot water shortages led workers from the Truck Factory “Steagul Rosu” (Red Flag) from Brasov to organize and protest. 400 workers marched through the city and attacked nomenclatura members. The Solidarity leaders in Poland saluted the protests in Brasov (Angi, 2011). The repressions were extremely harsh. Protesters were fired, some were jailed and tortured. Protesters were called bandits, alcoholics or hooligans.

1989 represented one of the most important and large scale protests in Romania. The protests were initiated in a moment when in the neighboring communist countries, protests and regime changes were occurring. The protest started in Timisoara in December 16, 1989. The brutal intervention of the secret police led to many citizens being injured and shot. Radio Free Europe communicated what was happening in Timisoara. The official news reported that hooligans were looting in Timisoara and that the situation was under control. On December 21st at a demonstration of support for Ceausescu the crowd turned against him. He and his wife had to leave Bucharest. On December 25th Ceausescu was sentenced to death and executed by a Military Court. There were many youth that participated in that revolution. Some argued that these were the “decretei”, the children born after the 1967 decree that banned abortion and who would represent, according to the party propaganda, the new society and develop a new type of human being.

During communism there were very few instances of opposition against the regime. The lack of protest involvement is particularly striking when the feeble Romanian opposition movement is compared to the Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Polish opposition protests (Angi, 2011).

The period after 1989 is marked by apathy and lack of activism. With the exception of turbulences and protests in 1990-1991 in Bucharest and the bloody ethnic conflict in Targu Mures in 1990 there were not any significant large scale demonstrations.

The 1990 protests brought to the spotlight the student community. The students and leaders of civil society protested against FSN (National Salvation Front) a temporary umbrella organization that decided to participate in the first founding elections despite promises of dissolution just before elections. Students were especially prominent in these protests. Their leader Marian Munteanu was proclaimed the leader of the student protests. The authorities organized a counter protest with workers from different factories in Bucharest. A week later the miners from Jiu Valley, supported by authorities, came to Bucharest and engaged in a civil conflict with students. The students were called hooligans (golani) by the interim president Ion Iliescu. Marian Munteanu together with hundreds of students were severely injured by miners. Miners returned to Bucharest in June 1990 and, in 1991, when they overthrew the reformist Petre Roman government. In 1999 they did not manage to arrive to
Bucharest. They were stopped at Costesti by a large police force. Several miners were jailed together with their leaders Romeo Beja and Miron Cozma. From 1990-1991 until 2012 there were no other large scale protests against the government in Romania. It is no surprise that the 2012 protests initiated so many comments and discussions about the changes that occurred in Romanian society. The protests were considered as a result of the extremely harsh economic austerity measures initiated by the Boc government. In Romania, 2011, wages in the public sector were decreased by 30%, 20% of the public service employees were let go and the VAT tax increased from 19% to 24%, raising suspicions that the IMF was experimenting with this country on the limits of austerity budgeting.

Others considered the January 2012 protest as an accumulation of a series of smaller protests that occurred in 2011. All these small scale protests were against politicians’ lack of competence in handling the economic crisis or incompetence in managing educational or environmental policies. We present a retrospective of the 2011 protests that led to the larger scale protests of 2012 (Domnisoru, 2011). This part will show that Romanians were largely passive to economic measures of austerity and only a few reacted and protested against them. In December 2010 there was a 30% increase of the price of petrol. This resulted in citizens boycotting a motel later the gasoline stations by buying one liter of gas with small coins. Some citizens were fined by the police for allegedly disturbing the order in the community. The majority of population however was passive. In Cluj, the first meeting of gas station boycotters gathered five cars in January 2011. This protest was followed by protests of retired military personnel whose pensions were recalculated despite the fact that after recalculation 90% of pensions were increased. In the same month and in the next 10000 labor union members at Dacia car company and other labor union members protested against the new labor law and accused authorities for serving the IMF (International Monetary Fund) interests. In February 100 protested against the demolition of a historical market place in Bucharest. Later on authorities decided temporarily not to demolish the building. In February 2013 the city hall decided to demolish the historical market building. In March 2011 labor unions continue their protests in Bucharest. On March 16, 8000 workers protested against the government. In the same month 300 students from Cluj marched for democratizing and opening up to students the decision making system within public universities. In April a few hundred citizens protested in small cities against the closing down of small city hospitals. In June 2011 police officers protested against wage cuts and the social movement “Democratie Reala Acum”(Real Democracy Now) organized protests in Cluj as a sign of solidarity with the Occupy Now movements. A few dozen students and activists took part in these protests. In July, August and September there were protests of a handful of activists against the lobby of Gold Corporation Company that plans to open gold mines in Rosia Montana. In November there were several protests against the Ministry of Education. 600 teachers in Turnu Magurele refused to enter schools because they did not receive their wages. In the same month students from the Faculty of History occupied the classrooms and refused to leave. They called their movement “Occupy History”. They protested against the decision of authorities not to include the students’ rights act as part of the law on education. On November 7 a few activists occupy the Continental Hotel, a deserted building in Cluj, as a protest against the Gold Corporation. The police forces acted with brutality and initiated criminal charges against the protesters. In Sibiu people with disabilities protested against the humiliating evaluations they have to go through in order to receive state assistance. In December the protesters representing the movement “Occupy Romania” were arrested and fined by the police force.

Although the number of protests in 2011 was high the number of protesters was very low in comparison with protest in other European countries or in United States. The 2012 protests
represented a unification of all the protest movements in 2011. That is why the messages during these protests were so diverse.

Methodology

Case selection

Since the change of political regime in December 1989, Romania went through major institutional changes. The transition period was marked by few economic and political reforms. The crisis oriented democratization or what Paul Sum and Ronald King (2011) called triage democratization did not yield positive results until 2007 when Romania joined the European Union. The transition period was associated with the development of a weak civil society (Badescu, Sum and Uslaner 2004). The legacies of communist oppression and lack of opposition against the previous regime has effects on the development of participatory democracy (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2013). Political participation of citizens in Romania is low. The Romanians engage in protests because conventional participation is not trusted to be efficient (Uslaner, 2004).

In Romania the internet penetration rate increased from 3% in 2000 (Internet world Stats) to 44% in 2012 (Internet world Stats, 2012). Among the internet users the youth (18 to 24) represent 38% and students are 22% of users. Other users are overwhelmingly employees with university graduation (New Media Trend Watch 2012). These categories are often are underrepresented in national surveys in Romania.

Finally more recent studies that link political participation and online activism yielded a different picture of participation. These studies focused on youth participatory practices. For example Gabriel Badescu and Toma Burean (2008) used a panel study on high school students to find out a positive relationship between illegal protest and online activism. Mercea (2011) discovered a positive relationship between support for Fân-Fest social movement and online activism.

The Data

In this research we survey the interplay between conventional, unconventional and protest participation of students and the quantity and quality of Internet use. For comparison purposes we make use of a nationally representative survey in Romania. Initially we compare the data from the national survey with the results obtained from a student survey in order to show the digital divide between students and the other categories of citizens. The national survey data had probabilistic sampling. The questions tapping on political participation included the questions found in the 2011 WVS (World Values Survey) and are part of a larger battery of questions specifically designed for the Romanian context. The nationally representative survey has 1102 respondents. 77 respondents were students that were excluded from the sample. The questionnaires for the national survey were applied in October 2012. They contain batteries of questions that target directly the protest activities of citizens in January 2012. Only 38 respondents declared that they participated in protests in January 2012. This made the analysis of protest participation in January 2012, on a nationally representative sample, difficult.

In order to test our hypotheses we decided to use the data from a 2012 student survey. This is a category of citizens that uses internet heavily, it is concentrated in the cities where the majority of protests took place increasing the likelihood of political activism. The downside is that the data will be biased toward a category of citizens that are educated come from families that are better off, urban and politically active than the general population (Weber and Bergman, 2003). That is why the results should be interpreted with caution. The survey
targeted students from six university centers from Romania: University of Bucharest, Aurel Vlaicu University from Arad, University of Oradea, Petru Maior University from Targu-Mures, Ovidius University from Constanta, Babes-Bolyai University and Technical University from Cluj-Napoca. The survey was applied in classes in November 2012 and it contains 1407 respondents. The rejection rate was 0% reducing the risk of self-selection. The surveyed age group of students is 19-26 years old with 63% females.

The measurement of political participation and online activism
In this paper we look at protest political participation, conventional and unconventional participation, Internet use and online activism. The construction of the questionnaire used the participation indicators from WVS 2011 and added a few questions. In the following paragraphs we describe the construction of the indicators used in this research. Conventional political participation consists of a battery of three questions that measure reported participation in local elections, involvement in activities of a political party and contacting a member of parliament. Unconventional political participation is a variable that merged eight questions that referred to contacting an NGO or another organization, wearing a badge, signed a petition, boycotting products or events, “buycott” products due to environmental or political reasons, donated money, contacted a newspaper or TV station and participated in a political gathering. Protest participation consists of the combination of two questions on participation in spontaneous protest acts and abstain from elections or referendum as a sign of protest. Unlike in other research on participation we decided to include declared non-participation in elections as a sign of protest participation. Protesting by abstaining is a form of political participation acknowledged in research on vote and turnout (Kang, 2004, Johnston and Pattie 1997). Membership in organizations was measured by combining nine questions covering the following types of organizations: sports clubs, religious associations, environmental associations, animal rights group, cultural associations, student organizations, political parties and other associations or organizations. Institutional trust was computed from students’ level of trust in the following institutions: city hall, government, political parties, parliament, justice system, police, European Union and church.

The question on the amount of time spent on internet was recoded. Online activism was measured by computing posting social and political issues on Facebook (a variable that needed recoding), whether the respondents used the Internet and social networks for any of the forms of political participation mentioned above.

Results
Political participation
The student survey includes many of the forms that political participation embodies. A categorization was created following the conventional and unconventional classification. Protest participation which belongs to the unconventional participation includes two categories of behaviors: individual (the refusal to participate to voting or referendum) and a collective action i.e. engaging in spontaneous protests.

Figure 2 reveals a discrepancy between student offline activism and other citizens’ political involvement. Students are more active in unconventional forms of political participation. A quarter of the student population was involved in protests and the same percentage refused to vote as a sign of protest and participated in political meetings. 29% signed petitions and almost half donated money for a cause.

More students contacted a member of parliament and more students are engaged in a political party. Somewhat fewer students than other citizens declared that they participated in the local elections. The declared turnout of citizens (81%) at local elections must be viewed with caution. The answers are influenced by the social desirability bias. The turnout at local
election in 2012 was 54%. These results confirm that students are a politically and socially engaged group.

Romanian students are less active than youth from Greece. According to Teocharis (2011), 56% of youth signed petitions, 73% participated in boycotts and 15% participated in illegal protests. 82% of youth participated in local elections, 4% contacted a politician and 18% did voluntary party work. These levels are similar to Romanian students’ conventional engagement. Hustinx et al. (2012) report higher levels of political participation of students from Flander and one university from Netherlands: 4% participated in illegal and 24% in legal demonstrations, 68% signed a petition, 61% did boycotting, 12% contacted a politician and 5% were active in a political party. With the exception of voting, political party activism and contacting members of parliament are participatory acts that are rarely used by students from Romania in a similar fashion with students from Netherlands, Belgium or youth from Greece. Students from Romania are more active than other citizens in Romania but engage in fewer participatory acts than youth from other countries.

Engagement in conventional political participation is correlated with unconventional participation, protest participation and membership in organizations. We find positive correlation with institutional trust. Female students are more involved in conventional participation than males. We find positive correlation with online activism. Unconventional participation correlates with protest and unconventional participation and with membership in organization and with education of the mother there is a weak positive relationship.

Protest participation correlates with the other forms of participation. There is no correlation with institutional trust and a negative relationship to income. More interestingly there is a positive association between online activism and engagement in political protest (Table 1).

Internet use and online activism

The purpose of this research is to explain protest participation and link it to online activism, other forms of participation adding socio-demographic determinants and political attitudes as controls.

In 2012, in the European Union, 84% of youth ages 16-24 used Internet daily. 58% of citizens with age over 55 have never used Internet (European Commission, 2012 p.9). 53% of all citizens in the EU use the internet at least once a day. In Romania 35% of citizens use the internet daily the lowest percentage in Europe with the exception of Portugal and has an equal proportion of internet users with neighboring Bulgaria (European Commission, 2012, p.8).

Figure 1 contrasts Internet use of students with other citizens. The data shows that the digital divide between students and other citizens is large. Almost all students in Romania use internet daily (87%). Female students (64%) use more frequently the Internet than male students. For other categories of citizens daily internet use is reserved to a few (23%). Compared to other citizens an overwhelming majority of students have Facebook accounts and use them daily (Figure 1). The other citizens’ daily use of social networks (11%), Internet (9%) or social networks for political participation is limited (6%). Student use of internet (42%) and social networking sites (31%) for political participation is more extensive. This data confirms that in Romania the Internet usage for social or political purposes is predominantly the repertoire of students.

Table 1 reveals that the time spent on Internet is not correlated to protest participation. There is a weak but significant negative correlation (-.104) between the time spent on internet and number of organizations that a student is involved in. This indicates support for the time replacement hypothesis (Quintelier and Vissers, 2008) that states that there is a negative correlation between time on internet and political participation.
Online activism was computed from two variables: internet political participation that is measured by asking students whether they have used the internet for any of the reported political participation practices and the frequency of posting social and political texts or topics on Facebook. The importance of activism on the net is disputed. Several see activism online as a complementary form of political participation used by young citizens. Others (Morozov, 2009) would argue that email alerts or signing petitions are part of a phenomenon labeled slacktivism defined as a set of “actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g. signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social networking website” (oxforddictionaries.com). In this study we cannot discern the potentially slacktivist activities from the online activist activities although having in mind previous research we suspect that slacktivist activities such as signing petitions or liking a political message seem be associated with offline activism. We consider internet as a catalyst for protesting. It is an environment for those that are politically engaged online to be exposed and share discontent with their fellow citizens increasing the potential for engagement in collective rebellion acts.

Online activism does not correlate with education and income of parents and with gender. It correlates with all the other variables. We find positive and significant associations with unconventional participation (.544), protest participation (.274), conventional participation (.244), organizational membership (.223), institutional trust (.116) and ideological orientation (.177). The students who are active online are also engaged in unconventional, conventional and protest participation, are members in organizations, trust institutions and have a rightist ideological orientation. We suspected that online activism and unconventional participation would be collinear. The multivariate regression collinearity diagnosis revealed that the variance inflation factor (VIF) did not exceed 1.7 for all the variables included in the multivariate models from Table 2.

Figure 1  Student and other categories of citizens’ internet use in Romania 2012
Figure 2. Political participation of students and the other categories of citizens in Romania 2012
Table 1. Spearman r correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>online activism</th>
<th>unconventional participation</th>
<th>protest participation</th>
<th>conventional participation</th>
<th>membership in organization</th>
<th>institutional trust</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>family income</th>
<th>mother education</th>
<th>father education</th>
<th>internet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>online activism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.544**</td>
<td>.275**</td>
<td>.244**</td>
<td>.223**</td>
<td>.116**</td>
<td>-009</td>
<td>-005</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unconventional</td>
<td>.544**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.332**</td>
<td>.390**</td>
<td>.362**</td>
<td>.092**</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.059*</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>-.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protest participation</td>
<td>.275**</td>
<td>.332**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.089**</td>
<td>.172**</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.106**</td>
<td>-.111**</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventional</td>
<td>.244**</td>
<td>.390**</td>
<td>.089**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>.120**</td>
<td>-.069*</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>-.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation</td>
<td>.223**</td>
<td>.363**</td>
<td>.172**</td>
<td>.269**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.059**</td>
<td>-.087*</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.067*</td>
<td>.086*</td>
<td>-.104**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>membership in</td>
<td>.116**</td>
<td>.092**</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>.120**</td>
<td>.059*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.098**</td>
<td>.089*</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organization</td>
<td>.177**</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.068*</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.072*</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-.034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
Explaining political protest

The previous sections showed Romanian students are more engaged in participatory acts than other citizens. This is not a surprise since students come mainly from urban areas. They live in cities that have a vibrant associational life compared to other cities that are not university centers. This section included the variables that explain engaging in political protests. We computed four explanatory categories. First there are socio demographics that include attributes of the parents (education and income) and students’ gender. Family attributes are considered as background variables that influence political and social engagement. The studies that criticize the impact of education on participation argue that it is a family with social and political engagement background that favors access to education and learning participatory practices. The second category refers to offline political participation individual and collective, conventional and unconventional including membership in organization. These variables impact political protest although we are aware that some forms of unconventional political participation might be consequences and not determinants of political protest. The third category refers to the political attitudes that are considered related to trust. Low levels of institutional trust could be associated with higher engagement in political protests. Leftism is associated with political protest engagement in several countries from Europe. The fourth category is Internet use that assesses the impact of the time spent on Internet and activism online. The expectation is that time on Internet would have a negative effect on protest participation and activism would have a positive effect. Table 2 presents three regression models. The first model contains socio-demographics of parents and students’ gender, the second adds political participation variables and the third adds political attitudes. The dependent variable is protest participation computed from two variables: reported engagement in spontaneous protest and refusal to turn out to vote as protest.

Socialization studies claim that the family has an important role in shaping youth political preferences. We find that students who protest come from families with lower income. This finding provides support for the socialization thesis and for the status inconsistency theory (Orum, 1974) and is contrary to the postulates of the post materialist thesis that claims that the affluent and better off would be more likely to be engaged in participatory acts. We discovered no effect of education of parents and protest engagement and a significant effect of gender. Female students are more likely to engage in social protest than males disconfirming findings that showed no relationship between gender and protest. Thus we refute the first hypothesis. Unconventional participation has a positive effect on protest participation. It is the variable with the strongest effect. Membership in associations or voting do not influence protest engagement. The second hypothesis is not refuted. We found no effect of left-right self-placement and protest participation. On the other hand student that distrust institutions are more likely to engage in protest participation. Thus we find support for our third hypothesis. Unlike the findings on Quintelier and Vissers (2008 p.9) we find that the time replacement hypothesis is valid. Moreover we find that online activism has a positive effect on protest participation. Therefore we find that the mobilization theory that views internet as a catalyst for participation is valid as well. This is a surprising finding since the two theories seem to be inconsistent (Quintelier and Vissers, 2008, p.4). It seems that those who engage in protest participation stay less time on the Internet and are more active online. Thus there seems to be an inverse relationship between the amount of time on internet and the use of internet for political participation. We find support for H4 and H5. Time spent on internet and online activism were part of all three models that explain political protest and reported statistically significant effects. The same can be said about gender and income. The next section will
discuss the implications and limits of our findings and suggest topics for future research on political protest participation.

**H1. There is a positive correlation between the level of education and income of parents on protest political participation. (Refuted)**

**H2. Participation in unconventional political acts has a positive effect on protest participation. (Tested successfully)**

**H3. Institutional trust has a negative effect on protest participation (Tested successfully)**

**H4. The time spent on internet has a negative effect on protest participation. (Tested successfully)**

**H5. Online activism has a positive effect on protest participation. (Tested successfully)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-demographics</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.101**(.001)</td>
<td>-.101**(.002)</td>
<td>-.071*(.036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Education</td>
<td>-.014(.704)</td>
<td>-.013(734)</td>
<td>.000(993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Education</td>
<td>-.002(.967)</td>
<td>.020(.604)</td>
<td>.019(646)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.112**(000)</td>
<td>-.109**(001)</td>
<td>-.110**(001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>-.052(.131)</td>
<td>-.027(.458)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconventional</td>
<td>.287**(000)</td>
<td>.300 (.000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Excluding protest)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in organization</td>
<td>.044(.203)</td>
<td>.017(.633)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political attitudes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Trust</td>
<td>-.098** (.004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-right self-placement</td>
<td>.001(975)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet use</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time spent on Internet</td>
<td>-.084**(.004)</td>
<td>-.076*(.016)</td>
<td>-.095**(004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online activism</td>
<td>.275**(000)</td>
<td>.097*(.011)</td>
<td>-.097*(.015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 Multivariate models that explain protest engagement**

**Discussion**

The survey of political protest participation and their determinants has sought to provide an understanding of the links between online and offline political participation. The article aimed to survey political protest in the context of a country whose citizens display low levels of political engagement. We decided to focus on political protest since it is considered to be more likely used by Romanians who participate and distrust institutional means of contestation (Uslaner, 2004). The purpose was to find out whether the online realm impacts this form of participation. Thus we tried to discover whether controlling for various socio-demographic variables, different forms of participation, political attitudes we find whether the
Internet acts as a catalyst for protest participation. The protests from this decade and the previous one that linked Internet to the societal changes from below and expression of dissent indicated that such a link is important and has profound effects on the mobilization of protesters. Romania is an atypical case because there is a low level of political participation despite the presence of civic education classes and a significant number of nongovernmental organizations. Internet might have a strong mobilization effect especially in the context of distrust in institutional means of contestation. Students from Romania are heavy users of Internet and of social networks such as Facebook. It is this segment of the society that is most likely to use the Internet for online and offline political participation. Students engage in more unconventional participatory behaviors than other categories of citizens but less than Greek, Dutch or students from Belgium. They sign more petitions, engage in protests, wear badges and donate money. Our data shows that gender and income affect protests engagement. This finding provides some evidence for cumulative deprivation theory (Orlum 1974) that deprived segments of the society are more likely to engage in political protests. With our data we were able to show that institutional trust has a negative effect on political protest engagement. Students that are critical towards the political system are more likely to protest and manifest their preferences. We find no relationship between membership in organizations and protest. Time spent on the internet however has a negative influence. Heavy internet use has negative effects on protest engagement. Online activism has positive effects on offline protest engagement. Internet has a mobilizing effect for protest participation similarly to family background and institutional distrust. Collective rebellion or protest participation is more likely to occur in mediums of shared discontent. Our contribution to the theories that explain why citizens engage in protests is that the online medium, as a platform for sharing discontent, has the potential to stimulate engagement in protests.

There are certain caveats that one has to be aware of when discussing this finding. The survey we used is representative for the students from Romania. We cannot generalize the findings to all categories of citizens. We contrasted the citizens’ levels of online and offline engagement with the students’ participatory practices in order to highlight the differences between the two categories. Students are socialized with the use of Internet from an early age and come from families from urban areas and which have a higher socio-economic status. The data cannot be generalized to all voting age youth from Romania. Having more diverse sample of youth (18-34) we assume that the impact of internet would be higher. The youth that already is employed might be more involved in political participatory practices because the stakes of participation are different. This research assumes causality and discusses of determinants of online activism on offline protest participation but this must not be so. A panel study is needed in order to assume causality. Last but not least a comparative approach would provide the framework for understanding the mobilization effect of online activism on offline political protesting.

This article provides an important contribution to understanding how the Internet impacts protest participation in democratic systems but also raises several questions that need to be researched and answered to. What is the relationship between categories of online political engagement and protest engagement? The level of protest engagement is related to generational effects or to the Internet use? Can internet lead to change of political regimes? Is the Internet a medium that promotes the expression of the diversity of opinions or it is a means to achieve greater mobilization for a cause? The role of the online sphere in political protest engagements has increased. The protests in Northern Africa, Moldova, Kirghizstan or the economic crisis related protests in Spain, Italy, France, Greece or Romania used internet as a mobilization factor. Its importance in understanding political protesting is not to be neglected.
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