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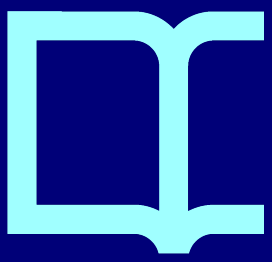

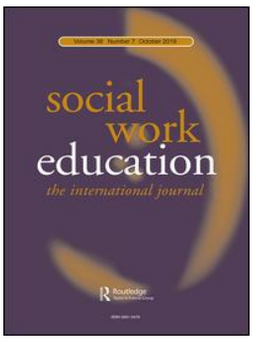

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Digital youth work: a systematic review with a proposal

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between three areas: (1) youth digital participation practices aimed at fostering digital citizenship; (2) the competencies (skills and knowledge) required for critical digital literacy; and (3) the role of digital media in social work education to foster social inclusion. The purpose of this examination is to develop the notion of digital youth work, specified as a proposal for critical digital literacy that guides young people toward digital participation with social impact. We conducted a systematic review of academic articles published from 2015 to 2019 to obtain an overview of these issues. The results were used to address the following aspects of digital youth work: the main scholar approaches on digital citizenship and how they relate to the dominant notions of youth; debates on youth digital participation and tensions arising from the use of digital media in social work education; and the characteristics of a critical digital literacy whose competencies are geared towards social inclusion of young people.

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Digital citizenship; digital youth work; digital literacy; youth participation; social work education; social inclusion

1. Introduction

Digital media has had a profound impact on the ways and means of participation in democratic societies, especially regarding the civic engagement of youth. From this premise, this article builds on the interdisciplinary field of youth media, understood as the 'range of opportunities and possibilities through which young people use and create media' (Johnston-Goodstar et al., 2014). In particular, we intend to deepen on the exploration of a critical youth media practice grounded in social justice and the promotion of empowerment and collective action, with specific attention to the connections and contributions of this approach to social work (ibid).

The results of a previous systematic review indicate that, despite the fact that a large part of education programs aimed at youth in social work provide recommendations to improve the educational aspect, only a minority attend to the implementation of digital media (Aguilar-Tablada et al., 2020). This suggests the need to update educational programs by introducing new skills; namely, communicative and digital (ibid). Therefore,

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these programs need to consider the gap between current needs and the actual level of digital skills of both professionals and young people, through new training initiatives in which both groups jointly experiment with digital media (López Peláez et al., 2020).

We aim at offering a proposal with guidelines for developing a program of 'youth-centered educational social work' (Gómez-Cirano et al., 2020). This approach considers that young people, when comparing to other population groups, 'have not traditionally been a priority of social welfare systems' and, in particular, they are immersed in a 'doble bond' since they are presented as the 'protagonist of the digital revolution' while they face a 'complex process of social integration' (ibid). Thus, following the field of 'e-social work' (López Peláez et al., 2017) but looking for the application of this framework to the social pedagogy tradition, we address the notion of digital youth work.

1.1. Between social pedagogy and social work

In order to clarify from where we carry out this systematic review, we situate our approach in its theoretical and practical aspects, as well as geographically. This proposal is framed within the tradition of social pedagogy (SP) in the Spanish context. SP is characterized, above all, by its breadth and diversity, and by the different meanings and interpretations it receives according to the different theoretical and practical traditions of each country, and even within national contexts (Úcar, 2011).

We propose to conceptualize SP as an academic discipline focused on the systematization of scientific knowledge for the development of socio-educational processes with its own theoretical, epistemological and methodological foundations. That is why SP appears as a discipline directly related to the professional spheres of social work, social education and youth work, offering pedagogical responses to social problems through social intervention actions and projects (Hämäläinen, 2015; Janer & Úcar, 2017).

In particular, we focus our research on professionals of social education. In the Spanish context, these professionals have a specific tradition both in social policies and academic environments, in which social pedagogy appears as one of the disciplines of reference, dealing with the analysis of social education practices and the effects they produce (Núñez, 1999, pp. 25, 26). This particularity affects the epistemological considerations in relation to the scientific literature and the positioning regarding the digital practices of social work (SW) and SP. The nuance, however, is related to the pre-eminence of educational methodologies in the field of digital social pedagogy, more focused on the processes of teaching and learning in social, and also digital, contexts.

Regarding the relationship of SP with the field of social work, according to Hämäläinen (2003), there are three predominant perspectives: 1) SP and SW differ completely; 2) SP and SW are identical; and 3) SP and SW complement each other. From our approach, we consider, on the one hand, that both come from different theoretical traditions with their respective practices, methodologies, tools and professional codes. On the other hand, both share the same scope of intervention and the same purposes: to ensure the inclusion, development and well-being of citizens (Moreno et al., 2018; Úcar, 2021). Therefore, neither a divergent approach, in which SP and SW are disconnected, nor a convergent approach, in which one is subordinated to the other, would fully fulfill their function. To this end, we are committed to the cooperation and complementarity of both disciplines and to open spaces for dialogue, both academic and

professional (Llena, 2018). In this sense, we consider that SP, with its own tradition, can contribute to social work education as a 'meta-theory' for developing training proposals (Hämäläinen, 1989, 2003).

This proposal has the goal of contributing to the social work education field by allowing the development of wide-ranging programs of critical digital literacy. Therefore, offers a possibility to deepen in the contemporary conditions of digitalization and its relationship with the educational aspects of social work.

2. Methodology

We conducted a systematic review of the academic literature to offer a synthesis of works on digital youth work. This method is understood as 'a review of a clearly formulated question that uses systematic and explicit methods to identify, select, and critically appraise relevant research, and to collect and analyze data from the studies that are included in the review' (Siddaway et al., 2019). This method presents some risks such as the misinterpretation of the results because of the heterogeneity of the sources or the incapacity of repeating and verifying them due to an insufficient specification of the search process. But also offers strong advantages because it is an efficient research design that allows a strict evaluation of the state of the art of a specific issue (Manterola et al., 2011). To clarify the process, we follow the PRISMA flow diagram to report the selected articles (Moher et al., 2009).

2.1. Research questions, keywords and inclusion/exclusion criteria

The following research questions (RQ) were used as the basis for designing and planning the systematic review:

RQ 1. How does the digital environment influence young people's social, civic and political participation and training in digital citizenship?

RQ 2. What competencies, skills and knowledge are needed for the digital literacy of social workers and young people?

RQ 3. What role might digital youth work play in empowering young people, especially in terms of the social inclusion of marginalized groups?

These RQs were converted into key words, used as search terms in the databases to obtain the academic literature:

digital 'youth participation'
'digital citizenship'
digital 'media literacy'
digital 'youth work'
digital 'social work'
digital 'social education'
digital 'youth empowerment'
digital 'social inclusion'

digital '(non-formal OR informal) learning'

After establishing the search terms, the following inclusion/exclusion criteria (I/EC) were applied:

I/EC 1. Time interval. Articles published between 2015 and 2019 will be included. Some articles are referenced with later years (2020 and 2021). This is due to their publication in issues corresponding to that years. Nevertheless, they are included as they were publicated online in 2019.

I/EC 2. Language. English or articles whose abstract is in English, although the text is in Spanish.

I/EC 3. Type of publication. Peer-reviewed academic articles.

I/EC 4. Research questions. Articles which, after reading the title and summary, tackle, at least, one of the three previously formulated research questions.

I/EC 5. Impact index. Articles published in academic journals with a ranking above 50% (Q1-Q2) according to InCites (Web of Science) or CiteScore (SCOPUS).

I/EC 6. Analysis categories. Based on the research questions, we established three categories for analysis: Digital Citizenship; Digital Literacy and Digital Youth Work. These sections are divided into two subcategories each, one theoretical and other practical. About the reasons for selecting these analytic categories, we agree that 'digital citizenship has become a topic of growing importance among academics and policymakers alike, at the center of debate and theorization around the skills youth need to navigate and actively participate in our digital world' (Cortesi et al., 2020). In the same way, 'digital literacy [. . .] aims, at its core, to prepare individuals with the skills needed to navigate the challenges and embrace the opportunities of our evolving digital world' (ibid). Also from an institutional perspective, both UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (2011), UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific (2016) and the European Union (Carretero et al., 2017; Vuorikari et al., 2016) are developing these concepts. So, with these two notions we intend to reflect a conceptual ecosystem in which we integrate the core concept that this research develops: 'digital youth work'.

Digital Citizenship

(1) - Theoretical approach to the concept of 'Digital Citizenship'.
(2) - Analysis of youth social, political, civic and/or cultural participation in the digital environment.

Digital Literacy

(1) - Theoretical approach to the concept of 'Digital Literacy'.
(2) - Analysis of digital competencies among social workers and/or young people.

Digital Youth Work

(1) - Theoretical approach to the concept of 'Digital Youth Work'.
(2) - Analysis of the relationship between youth empowerment and social inclusion and digital technology.

The following databases and search chains were used[1]:

Web of Science: TS = ((digital 'youth participation') OR (digital 'media literacy') OR ('digital citizenship') OR (digital 'youth work') OR (digital 'social inclusion') OR (digital 'youth empowerment') OR (digital 'social education') OR (digital '(non-formal OR informal) learning') OR (digital 'social work')).

SCOPUS: TITLE-ABS-KEY ((digital 'youth participation') OR (digital 'media literacy') OR ('digital citizenship') OR (digital 'youth work') OR (digital 'social inclusion') OR (digital 'youth empowerment') OR (digital 'social education') OR (digital '(non-formal OR informal) learning') OR (digital 'social work')).

2.2. The searching and filtering process

The searches were conducted on 12 December 2019. I/EC 1, 2 and 3 were applied to both databases, indicating the inclusion of academic articles in English (title, abstract and keywords) published between 2015 and 2019. A total of 823 articles were obtained, after a manual review, in which 39 book chapters were identified and excluded, and also 41 duplicate publications. The search was supplemented by consulting journals specializing in social work and social pedagogy based on the authors' expert knowledge, which provided a further 7 relevant articles.

The search phase produced a total of 830 academic articles. For a description of the search, filtering and selection phases, see the PRISMA group flow diagram (Moher et al., 2009) as shown in Figure 1.

The next step was reading the title and abstract of the 830 articles. 626 were rejected as they did not answer the research questions (I/EC 4), leaving 204 articles in the filtering and selection process. I/EC 5 was applied to the remaining articles. To do this, we searched for the publication journal in InCites (Web of Science) and, if it did not appear there, in CiteScore (SCOPUS). We noted the percentile assigned to its category and the field of the publication. After this filter, 99 articles were rejected, leaving 105, whose full text we then downloaded and read. Five of the 105 articles were ruled out as they could not be retrieved (2) or were published before 2015 (3), leaving 100 articles included and 104 excluded.

After reading the full articles, they were scored in the six study subcategories. The score was based on whether it approached the issue by elaborating on it (1 point), did so partially just mentioning the terms (0.5 points), or not at all (0 points). Each article was scored out of 6 and a minimum cut-off of 3 points was set to ensure the relevance of the article to the research. As it is showed in Figure 2, 24 articles made the cut for being included.

We then read the sample of 24 articles and established a coding system for the six subcategories. Once the articles had been coded, extracts were taken from each article under the corresponding subcategories. The following sections describe the common points and conflicts between the articles and the most relevant debates in them.

3. Results

The following is a discussion about the categories selected for this systematic review: 'digital citizenship', 'digital literacy' and 'digital youth work'. For this purpose, we start developing the main scholar approaches on digital citizenship, considering that this is the more holistic notion, thus allowing to situate the debate about the dominant notions of youth regarding

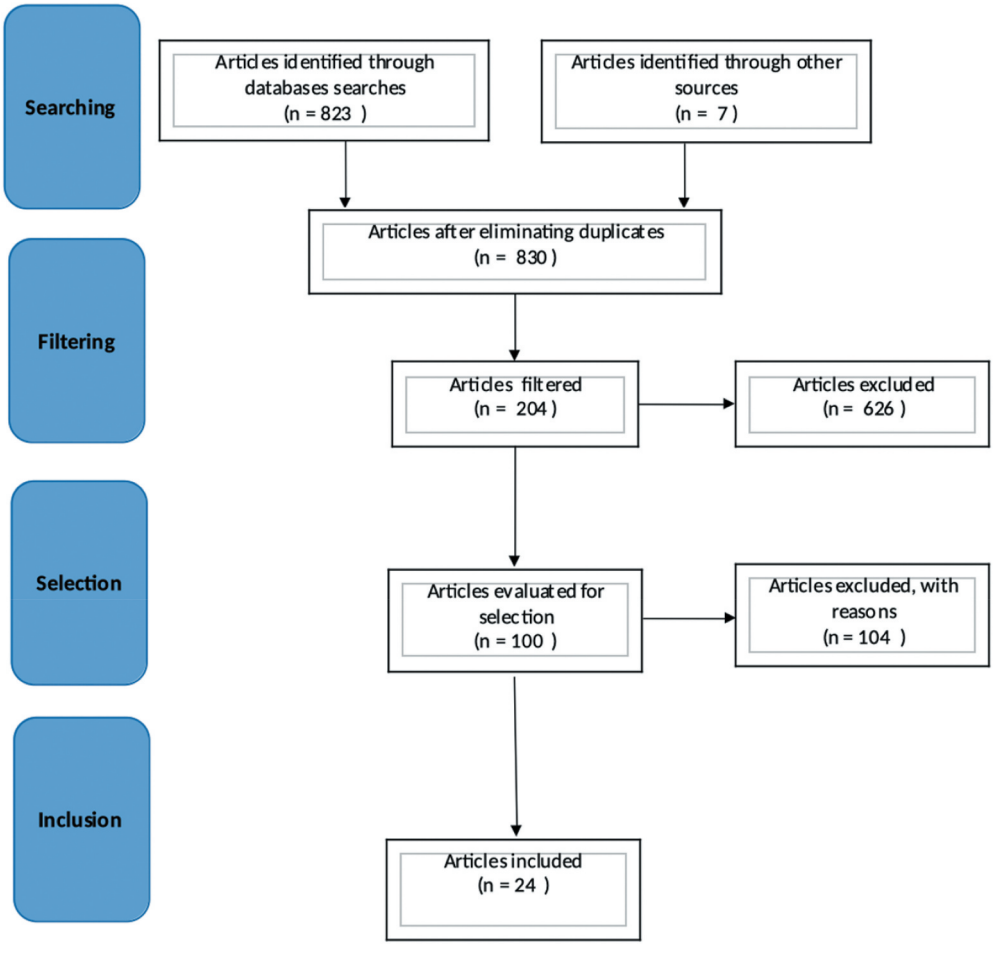

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram (Moher et al., 2009).

their digital participation. Next, we situate at the core the relationship between youth participation, digital media and social work education to highlight the tensions arising between them. From this pivotal point, we orient the proposal through a debate around the notion of digital literacy making emphasis on social inclusion. Thus, we provide a wide perspective of which elements could constitute a proposal that contributes to the social work education field with programs focused on youth and digital media.

3.1. Scholar approaches on digital citizenship

3.1.1. What's digital citizenship

Understanding 'digital citizenship' as a holistic concept implies that, first of all, it is necessary to specify what is meant by 'digital citizenship'. In the academic literature it appears as a yet undefined term or, at least, one currently undergoing definition, where the discussion covers various fields, such as education, communication and political

Title	1) Theoretical approximation to Digital Citizenship	2) Analysis of the practices of political, social, and civic participation of young people	3) Theoretical approximation to Digital Media Literacy	4) Analysis of the digital competences, skills and knowledges of educators and young people	5) Theoretical approximation to Digital Social Education / Digital Social Work / Digital	6) Analysis of the empowerment and social inclusion through ICT	Total (6 max.)
The Social Impact of Digital Youth Work: What Are We Looking For?	Partially	YES	YES	YES	YES	Partially	5
A Concept Analysis of Digital Citizenship for Democratic Citizenship Education in the Internet Age	YES	YES	YES	Partially	NO	Partially	4
Digital Literacy Through Digital Citizenship: Online Civic Participation and Public Opinion Evaluation of Youth M	YES	YES	YES	Partially	NO	Partially	4
e-Inclusion and e-Social work: new technologies at the service of social intervention	Partially	NO	Partially	Partially	YES	YES	3,5
Tweet, Tweet!: Using Live Twitter Chats in Social Work Education	NO	Partially	Partially	YES	YES	Partially	3,5
E-technology and Community Participation: Exploring the Ethical Implications for Community-based Social Wor	Partially	YES	NO	NO	YES	Partially	3
Social work and digitalisation: bridging the knowledge gaps	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Teaching Technology Competencies: A Social Work Practice With Technology Course	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Beyond the Echo Chamber: Pedagogical Tools for Civic Engagement Discourse and Reflection	YES	Partially	YES	Partially	NO	NO	3
Civic media literacies: re-imagining engagement for civic intentionality	NO	YES	YES	Partially	NO	Partially	3
Digital Citizenship with Social Media: Participatory Practices of Teaching and Learning in Secondary Education	YES	YES	Partially	Partially	NO	NO	3
Media literacy and digital divide: a cross-cultural case study of Sweden and Lithuania	NO	Partially	YES	Partially	NO	YES	3
Understanding the relationship between new media literacy, communication skills, and democratic tendency: M	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	3
How Media Literacy Supports Civic Engagement in a Digital Age	Partially	YES	YES	Partially	NO	NO	3
Analyzing youth digital participation: Aims, actors, contexts and intensities	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	3
Assessing New Media Literacies in Social Work Education: The Development and Validation of a Comprehensiv	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	3
Inquiry-Based Learning about Technologies in Social Work Education	NO	NO	YES	Partially	YES	Partially	3
ICT Use and Digital Inclusion among Roma/Gitano Adolescents	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	3
Media literacy in Montenegro	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	3
ICT, young people and social work: distances and opportunities	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	3
Social work educators' perceived barriers to teaching with technology: the impact on preparing students to wor	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	3
Young people learning from digital media outside of school: The informal meets the formal	NO	Partially	Partially	YES	Partially	Partially	3
Educational potential of e-social work: social work training in Spain	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	3
Critical digital literacy: Technology in education beyond issues of user competence and labour-market qualifica	Partially	NO	YES	YES	NO	Partially	3

Figure 2. Articles included and their punctuations following I/EC6. Own elaboration.

science (Gleason & Von Gillern, 2018). Furthermore, inclusion of other concepts such as literacy, competencies, participation and access to digital technology makes digital citizenship a multi-dimensional term (Panke & Stephens, 2018).

One particularly relevant debate for clarifying this issue emerges from the literature: how to (re)interpret digital citizenship (Choi, 2016). Digital citizenship can be understood as an additional layer adapting previous notions of citizenship to digital technology, or, conversely, with the digital element as a key factor requiring specific conceptualization. With regard to the former position, if digital citizenship is not an additional dimension of citizenship, it might be understood as a set of practices consisting of civic activities both exclusively in the online environment and in conjunction with the offline environment (Yue et al., 2019). An intermediate position views digitalization as an extension of previous notions of citizenship (Panke & Stephens, 2018). Moving toward the opposite end of the debate, digital citizenship is seen as a different concept from citizenship, but not separate from prior notions linked exclusively to the offline environment (Choi, 2016). Although digitalization is viewed as a factor requiring a separate conceptualization of digital citizenship, prior notions are also considered pertinent.

3.1.2. Approaches to digital citizenship

In the review we find two conceptual analyses identifying key elements for 'digital citizenship' (Choi, 2016; Gleason & Von Gillern, 2018). In particular, the following four categories are particularly useful: 'ethics', 'media literacy', 'participation/commitment' and 'critical resistance' (Choi, 2016). These conceptual analysis categories are used below to focus on the main scholar approaches regarding the interpretation of digital citizenship in the literature.

The first approach, known as 'normative' (Gleason & Von Gillern, 2018), places particular emphasis on 'ethics', meaning safe and responsible use of digital technology, and awareness of digital rights and obligations (Choi, 2016). Another main approach focuses on the capacity to participate digitally, extending social inclusion (Yue et al., 2019), and stressing the 'participation/commitment' (Choi, 2016), which falls within the practical interpretation of digital citizenship. A third approach makes emphasis on the participatory element, while highlighting the need for a civic skill and knowledge set (Gleason & Von Gillern, 2018), with special weight on the 'media literacy' issue (Choi, 2016). This third approach could serve as a corollary of the previous two, especially if it emphasizes the fourth category, 'critical resistance', consisting of criticism of existing power structures, based on hacker ethics and political activism inspired by movements like the Arab Spring, the *Indignados* and Occupy (Choi, 2016).

3.1.3. Youth dominant conceptions in the context of digital citizenship

To vinculate the above scholar approaches on digital citizenship with digital youth work, they must be seen in the context of the dominant conceptions of youth in the academic literature (De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020; Yue et al., 2019). Firstly, the normative perspective takes a 'control-based approach', seeing young people as 'citizens-to-be', still lacking certain codes of behaviour to become full citizens (Yue et al., 2019). This approach, where young people are passive subjects needing guidance, stems from a 'hierarchical perspective with oppressive and discriminatory consequences', being also the most widespread (De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020). Secondly, the merely participatory perspective is associated with a 'freedom-based approach' (Yue et al., 2019). Youth, as an agent of generational rupture, is conceived as a 'counter-culture that provides innovative pathways of knowledge and creation' (De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020). The risk in this approach is that it can lead to uncritical acceptance of participation as implicitly positive (Literat et al., 2018).

To overcome this dichotomy, the third perspective adopts the notion of participation to stress that this should be 'civic participation' (Yue et al., 2019). This perspective tackles not only the practices of digital participation, but also how these practices relate to the offline environment. Here, the interrelation between digital citizenship and offline and institutional environments is a particularly relevant point. Youth is not conceived as a passive subject or active agent, both approaches may be synthesized based on a critical assessment of young people's discourses and actions (De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020). This requires consideration of the complex technological environment, and also the social, political, cultural, legal and commercial frameworks in which youth develop. This open notion of youth offers greater possibilities for developing a critical pedagogy aligned with young people's needs, aspirations and fears.

Thus, *digital youth*, understood as 'youth citizenship in the digital era' (Pawluczuk et al., 2019), would benefit from a closer relationship with professionals that, from a communitarian social work perspective situated in a normative framework of social justice (Shevellar, 2016), ground its practices in the principle of participation, understood as a 'transformative process with the people at the centre of their own development' and that 'enables the exercise of citizenship and agency' (ibid). In this sense, we intend that our digital youth work approach enables pathways for civic participation through digital media.

3.2. Tensions between youth participation, social work and digital technology

3.2.1. The meaning of digital youth participacion

A problem in the field of digital participation is that the academic literature tends not to treat youth as a particular category (Literat et al., 2018). Based on the debate on digital participation cultures, in which digital participation is seen as a 'sociocultural practice' (ibid), youth should be studied as a separate social and cultural category. In this debate, it is important to analyse how digitally mediated environments can permit (but also limit) ways, channels and means of innovative participation. In doing so, elements such as 'social position' and 'cultural capital' should be considered key factors that facilitate (or restrict) youth digital participation (ibid).

Another key debate on the notion of 'civic engagement' may be tackled (Martens & Hobbs, 2015; Mihailidis, 2018; Panke & Stephens, 2018; Yue et al., 2019). Specifically, the literature discusses whether the digital environment promotes civic engagement among young people. On the one hand, this is supported by works on 'digital participation cultures', which see digital technology as lowering 'barriers to expression and civic commitment, offering support for creation and exchange, facilitating peer-to-peer learning pathways and generating social bonds' (Jenkins et al., 2006; in Literat et al., 2018). On the other hand, the current digital environment dominated by social media would lead to a civic intervention divide, in this case between awareness and significant action. Social media facilitates broad information consumption and exchange among young people, but its design and structure impedes the step towards action because of homogeneous filter bubbles, polarization in spaces that profit from conflict, and inappropriate behaviours that foster apathy, thereby reducing social media use to consumption (Mihailidis, 2018). A specific analytical framework is required to explore habits and experiences that promote civic engagement and overcome this debate.

In this analysis of youth digital participation, Literat et al. (2018) distinguish between the following categories: 'aims', 'actors', 'contexts' and 'intensities'. With regard to 'aims' and 'actors', one can differentiate between a type of participation with more expressive aims, normally individual, and another with more 'instrumental' aims, generally collective. In 'contexts', it should be noted that the habitual assumption relating formal contexts to top-down initiatives and informal contexts to bottom-up initiatives does not always hold true (ibid). With regard to 'intensities', one may differentiate between executive participation, where young people follow the orders of adults who design participatory practices, and structural participation, where young people are involved in the design of the practices. Thus, one can demystify the idea that participation invariably has an empowering component. This idea helps cover the deficiencies in assessing the impact of initiatives to promote youth digital participation (ibid). On this point, the role of social workers is essential in determining opportunities for young people's (re)appropriation of participatory digital media practices.

3.2.2. Social work in the context of young people and digital media

The review suggests that, in the triangle formed by young people, digital media and social work, an overall analysis reveals an 'increase in the tensions and contradictions dividing them' (De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020). In this complex relationship, social workers' tensions stem from the mistrust caused by the 'threat of dehumanization', 'oppression

in their professional practice' and 'lack of digital competencies' (ibid). With regard to the application of digital media in social workers' professional practice, the predominance of *technological solutionism* (Morozov, 2013; in De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020) leads to a tendency towards 'disconnection' and 'suspicion' (De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020). To this tendency, Taylor (2017) adds the 'disjointedness' as expressed by Rafferty, 'between how technologies are perceived, and how they are being used' and the need to contextualize the 'multi-layered, fluid and complex' relationship of social work with digitalisation (ibid). Diaconu et al. (2020) point to two specific barriers related to digital media: firstly, 'lack of both technical and institutional support at work'; secondly, 'the nature of digital technology itself, with rapid, continuous updates and the overload involved in integrating them into professional practice'

One proposal for overcoming these barriers involves familiarizing both students and professionals to the essential tools available (ibid). However, this approach relies basically on the aforementioned *technological solutionism* (Morozov, 2013). These issues highlight the need for digital youth work to develop training proposals for social work educators, students and professionals based on broad principles covering the socio-technical impacts of technological innovation, through methods such as 'research-based learning' (Zorn & Seelmeyer, 2017). This approach may offer a first step towards converting social workers' mistrust and disengagement with digital media into opportunities to generate critical frameworks and tools for understanding and using them, actively participating in their design and implementation (De Lucas & D'Antonio, 2020). In this line, it deserves to be explored the educational potential of the notion 'e-social work' (García-Castilla et al., 2019), aiming to 'empower people individually, in groups and within communities, while providing social workers tools to analyse, assess and intervene through new strategies targeted at users of digital environments' (ibid). From a pedagogical innovation perspective, digital media provides 'multiple opportunities for training social workers by drawing on experiences or good practices that are efficient in terms of return, collective well-being, or better and faster interventions in all areas of social services in an interdisciplinary manner' (ibid).

In developing this kind of program of digital youth work that resolves the tensions between youth participation, digital media and social work, digital literacy can help 'bridging the knowledge gaps' (Taylor, 2017) that would allow closing the digital divide in order to foster social inclusion of young people.

3.3. A proposal of digital literacy for youth social inclusion in the arena of social work

As with digital citizenship, the notion of digital literacy requires contextualization before developing it. Here we adopt a similar position. Digital literacy requires its own conceptualization, while recognizing its precedents in media literacy. In the wide variety of articles relating digital and media literacy, a conception predominates whereby media literacy is seen as a 'skill set to access, use, create, analyse and assess information in a variety of communicative forms'[2] (Choi, 2016; Liubieniene & Thunqvist, 2015; Mihailidis, 2018; Young, 2015). This shared definition, with superficial changes, stems from the proposal by Aufderheide (1993) from almost 30 years ago.

As with the application of digital media to social work education, this hegemonic skill acquisition-based framework may be classified as 'solutionist' (Mihailidis, 2018). Such media literacy limits its civic impact for various reasons: it assumes a critical distance in citizenship which is not always the case; it promotes technical and instrumental skills over knowledge and ethical values; it focusses on deficiencies over proposals; on content over formats; and it prioritizes individual responsibility over collective action (ibid). Furthermore, effectively conceptualizing digital literacy in relation to its media precedent requires analysing the influence of dominant norms and values in present-day digital culture, especially when such norms impede intervention to foster literacy: 'spectacularization', 'delegitimization of institutions', and the 'civic agency gap' (ibid).

Digital literacy, as a specific concept, was coined by Gilster (1997), placing greater emphasis on 'mastery of ideas than on technical skills' (in Yue et al., 2019), transcending such skills to gain a broad understanding of digital environments (Panke & Stephens, 2018). However, a search for a new definition in the literature review continues to bring up references to individual skills and abilities for participating in digital society (Panke & Stephens, 2018; Yue et al., 2019). We consider integrating the following constructs particularly important to reinforce the civic intentionality of media literacy: 'intervention' as empowering people to act publicly; 'care' as ethical receptivity and interrelation; 'critical awareness' as perception of reality in a transformable situation; 'persistence', as withstanding fast communicative flows; and 'emancipation', as active participation in the design of alternative realities (Mihailidis, 2018).

Inclusion of these constructs in a proposal for digital literacy may be complemented by the notion of 'critical digital literacy' (Pötzsch, 2019). Given the general lack of thought regarding the implementation of digital technology in educational environments (a consequence of the aforementioned technological solutionism), less emphasis should be placed on efficiency-oriented technical devices and skills and more on critical abilities (ibid). Developing such a proposal, in line with 'critical resistance' (Choi, 2016), means promoting reflection on and use of non-commercial alternatives to corporate products and services, understanding the history of digital technology and techno-political practices, and focussing on issues related to power, surveillance and exploitation in the digital environment (Pötzsch, 2019). Thus, critical digital literacy does not focus on labour market skills but on promoting autonomous digital citizenship (ibid). Such a framework contributes to the civic renewal of digital literacy, where intervention proposals need to be assessed in terms of their social impact (Mihailidis, 2018).

Social impact may be understood as: 'all social and cultural consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs, and generally cope as members of society' (Burdge & Vanclay, 1996, p. 59; in Pawluczuk et al., 2019). Ensuring digital literacy contributes to digital youth work requires developing a set of digital competencies to make the proposal operational. However, we found that most approaches to digital competencies (Martens & Hobbs, 2015; Pawluczuk et al., 2019; Pérovic, 2015; Tugtekin & Koc, 2019; Young, 2015) ignore a fundamental factor for digital youth work: the digital divide understood in socioeconomic rather than technical terms. Seen in this light, digital competencies should stem from an analysis of different types of access and use, according

to the different economic strata in society. Consequently, technical skills are considered a prerequisite for acquiring advanced psychological abilities, whether these be 'cognitive-intellectual', 'socio-communicative', or 'affective-emotional' (Choi, 2016).

With this point in consideration when working with young people, a framework such as the proposed by McInroy (2021) could be useful for developing a proposal to make professionals and students of social work more digitally literate: 'continuing engagement with ICTs', as being updated about the current and emerging trends on digital media; 'online professionalism', meaning being aware of how their personal activities online can affect their professional practices; 'assessing risks and opportunities', i.e. being able to address the inequalities resulting from using digital technologies in their work; 'applying professional ethics', as the need to extend the standards in social work practice to digital environments; and 'thoughtful integration of ICTs into practice', meaning a reflection about the suitability of using digital technologies when a social intervention is developed.

3.3.1. Social inclusion and the digital divide

Social inclusion through digital media, or 'e-inclusion' (Raya Díez, 2018), is understood as the 'actions carried out to help bridge the digital divide by promoting access to new technologies for the people, groups, and communities most at risk of exclusion' including 'different initiatives and projects aimed at promoting access to ICTs and raising digital literacy by carrying out various kinds of educational actions' (ibid). At this point, the key notion is 'digital divide' (Choi, 2016; Garmendia & Karrera, 2019; Liubieniene & Thunqvist, 2015; Raya Díez, 2018). As this digital divide is not just technical, but mainly social and economic, developing digital youth work should consider social class as well as the influence of such factors as gender and cultural origin (Choi, 2016; Garmendia & Karrera, 2019) on structural inequalities. The challenge is to tackle the impact of these socioeconomic factors and their interrelation with the *network society* (Castells, 2010; in Liubieniene & Thunqvist, 2015). Digital youth work needs to understand and explain structural social changes arising from digitalization, from modifications in daily life to the emergence of a new elite whose power is based on profound knowledge of digital media, termed the *netocracy* (Bard & Söderqvist, 2002; in Liubieniene & Thunqvist, 2015). In this way, digital youth work can tackle the future of social structures, with interventions ranging from identity and cultural issues to politics and economics.

Therefore, it is not enough to provide technological infrastructure; it is more important to 'guarantee educational, sociocultural and economic development for all segments of population' (Liubieniene & Thunqvist, 2015). This means technology is no longer an end in itself but a means to such development. Digital youth work needs an 'open-ended process of deliberation which puts the views of the people whose lives are affected at the heart of the development process' (Kleine, 2013; in Garmendia & Karrera, 2019). Such spaces and times require greater public sector funding and provision, thus gearing them toward reducing 'inequality and the knowledge divide and to foster greater social justice' (Stoilova et al., 2016; in Garmendia & Karrera, 2019). With regard specifically to young people, it is essential to reinforce and guarantee their citizen's rights to a digital and social education. In this way, critical digital literacy initiatives can contribute to develop digital competencies geared toward social inclusion of marginalized youth groups and their empowerment in co-designed environments to learn and experiment collectively with social workers.

4. Discussion: limits and opportunities of digital youth work

This review identifies arguments in favour of an increase on the use of digital media in social work education (Young, 2015) and others noting the lack of literature (Diaconu et al., 2020; Taylor, 2017). From the analysis of the literature reviewed it can be stated that there has been an increase of publications about social work education and its relationship with young people and with digital technologies. At the same time, the scarce of literature addressing specifically this triangle around the notion of digital youth work, and the fact that the role of professionals in digital youth work has been given little attention shows the need for further studies in this area of research (Pawluczuk et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has further strengthened this view. This social and health crisis has exacerbated the limitations noted in this article with regard to applying digital media to social work: dehumanization and bureaucratization of professional practices; lack of knowledge and competencies; little institutional and technical support; and excessive technological overload in the workplace.

With regard to the future of education and its relation to digital technology, the pandemic marks a clear point of inflection (Selwyn et al., 2020). Partial or total lockdown has forced education to adapt to the online environment. This situation has increased technological acceleration, with more privatization through outsourcing to corporate services (Williamson & Hogan, 2020). The urgency imposed by the pandemic has provided technological solutionism with cover for EdTech corporations to gain ground over educational institutions, resulting in the creation of new power networks within the EdTech corporations themselves, international governance entities and national governments (Selwyn et al., 2020).

This trend takes an even more serious turn if we consider that it is framed within what the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights calls the 'digital welfare state', consisting of the use of digital systems to manage the different forms of protection or social assistance under the justification of the savings they entail by reducing staff, increasing efficiency or reducing fraud, in addition to the prestige of being at the technological forefront (Alston, 2019). This 'technological solutionism' masks the threats of using the services and products of large technology companies, whose gender, race and sexual diversity biases and discriminations, deepen the social exclusion of marginalized groups and pose a serious danger to human rights and a drift towards a 'dystopia of digital welfare.' (ibid).

With regard to the limits of the systematic review conducted in this article, the same technological acceleration that social workers complain about and the constant need to refresh skills also affect academic debates. Hence, despite the aim of identifying well developed and deep trends on the relationship between digitalisation and education with long-term endurance, in the period between this review and its publication relevant debates following on from the ones described here have emerged. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the pandemic has profoundly disrupted social and educational structures. These transformations will be considered and discussed in subsequent research, of which this review is barely the first step. We will shortly be exploring the relationship of professionals and young people with digital media through quantitative (surveys) and qualitative approaches (focus groups and interviews). Thus, we aim to develop a digital youth work program, applicable within social work education field, understood as a critical digital pedagogy to foster young people's civic participation.

5. Conclusions

This article provides a review of the academic literature published between 2015 and 2019 on digital youth work with the broad aim of suggesting and orientating the debates in the field of educational social work to the challenges of the digital era. In this process, we consider the importance of involving an analysis of the broad notion of digital citizenship. Digitalization requires separate conceptualization with regard to previous notions of citizenship, while also bearing such notions in mind to contextualize it and link it with the offline environment.

The review of the literature identifies the main scholar approaches on digital citizenship, which we link to the dominant conceptions of youth. The first approach, which predominates in educational circles, adopts a normative approach, based on habits, rights and obligations of citizenship, where young people are seen as passive subjects. The second main approach offers a participative focus, based on skills for participating in society, where young people are considered active agents. The third approach also focuses on participation but stressing its civic and critical aspects. This latter position helps synthesize the previous two approaches and adopt an indeterminate conception of youth, thereby requiring critical assessment depending on its context. This approach offers more scope for developing a critical pedagogy in social work to accompany young people in their digital participation practices.

Digital participation, understood as a sociocultural practice, requires youth to be considered as a specific social and cultural category. Thus, the limitations and possibilities of the digital environment may be considered in terms of youth participation practices, taking into account their social position and cultural capital. These issues are essential in approaching the role of digital media in youth civic engagement. Furthermore, a precise analysis of youth digital participation should also examine the aims, actors, contexts and intensities of these practices. These are the areas in which social workers can determine young people's capacity for reappropriation in their digital participation projects.

However, social workers face a number of hurdles to implementing digital media in their professional practice, such as lack of technical and institutional support, limited digital competencies and the speed and overload involved in using such technology. The dominant framework (technological solutionism) generates distrust among professionals due to the threat of dehumanization and oppression it produces in their work. We suggest digital literacy could provide answers to the challenges arising from implementing digital media in both professional practice and in the relationship with young people, while also fostering social inclusion.

Digital literacy, as an extension and transformation of media literacy, also falls within the scope of hegemonic technological solutionism, stressing the acquisition of technical and instrumental skills over critical knowledge and ethical values. Developing critical digital literacy requires both taking the legacy of media literacy focussed on its civic relevance and considering the norms imposed on digital culture. Use of free technology, the study of the history of digital technology and techno-politics, and analysing power relations, surveillance and exploitation in the digital environment are key elements in this proposal. Social work education, expressed in terms of critical digital literacy, should be assessed according to the social impact of its initiatives.

Digital competencies for operationalizing a proposal of such characteristics should be considered an essential issue: the digital divide, in technical and, above all, socioeconomic terms. Technical and instrumental skills are considered a prerequisite for complex intellectual, social and affective psychological abilities. Thus, digital youth work can carry out analyses and make proposals that consider structural inequalities both prior to and resulting from digitalization, using approaches ranging from sociocultural to political-economic perspectives. This task requires space and time for reflection open to the people affected, greater public investment and reinforcement of the citizenship's digital rights.

Notes

1. With regard to this section, please view the record sheet (https://bit.ly/3a7hkyS).
2. Authors' translation, original quote: 'conjunto de habilidades para acceder, usar, crear, analizar y evaluar información en una variedad de formas comunicativas'.

Data availability statement

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available at https://bit.ly/3a7hkyS

Disclosure statement

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