Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology:

Promoting the Ethical Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools

A THESIS

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by

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DECLARATION

I, Lucianne Zammit, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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October 2022

Acknowledgments

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Yuri and Eva

May you never stop reaching for your dreams.

Impact Statement

This study focuses on how Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies. It investigates how they do this through the formal curriculum, as well as through school policies which promote digital citizenship. The thesis will provide valuable insight into how Maltese schools deal with issues such as cyberbullying, sexting, revenge porn, online pornography, hate speech and radicalisation through the curriculum and through school policies. The findings are informative for policy makers, Heads of College Networks, heads of schools, teachers, teacher-trainers and other educational practitioners. Some policy makers and practitioners who are directly involved in the shaping of the Maltese educational system have consented to act as participants in the study. It is hoped that they will have a particular interest in the findings of this research, especially since they have dedicated some valuable time to participate in this study. It will also be of interest to practitioners in schools (teachers, curriculum leaders and heads of schools), some of whom have participated in the study, as well as educators who are involved in initial teacher training and teachers' Continuous Professional Development. The research addresses a gap in the literature about the teaching of digital citizenship in Malta, since there are very few data on this topic. The ultimate aim is to inform school policies and lead to curricular changes, which would benefit a whole generation of Maltese students.

Abstract

Technology has become ubiquitous in young people's lives. However, being online does not always bring benefits. Social media platforms have become notorious for facilitating digital sexual abuse, cyberbullying, online hate speech and radicalisation, with young people being both the victims and the perpetrators of such harms. Although they have been brought up with digital technologies, they do not always know how to use them ethically. Thus, through the teaching of digital citizenship, schools often try to help students acquire the necessary skills and values that will enable them to use technology in an ethical manner.

This study explores an under researched topic: how Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of technology. Focusing on Maltese secondary schools, this study is based on a qualitative evaluative case-study. It employs semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten policy makers and experts, three heads or assistant heads of schools and eight teachers, as well as document analysis to analyse the secondary school curriculum and relevant school policies. The study draws on constructivism as a philosophical framework and employs the Braun and Clarke method of thematic analysis.

The study demonstrates that the participants were concerned about students' unethical use of technology and believed that schools have an important role to play in the teaching of digital citizenship. However, it also shows significant gaps in the school curriculum and school policies. Although some subjects (such as Personal, Social and Career Development and Ethics) attempt to address topics such as cyberbullying, sexting, revenge porn, online pornography, hate speech and radicalisation, there is not enough time allocated to such topics to do so in a satisfactory manner. Also, school polices often fail to take into account the ways that students use technology to communicate with each other, resulting in a failure to tackle complex issues such as cyberbullying, sexting and radicalisation.

Keywords: digital citizenship, moral education, ethics, curriculum, policy.

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List of Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

BYOD: Bring Your Own Device

CMC: Computer-Mediated Communication

DCE: Digital Citizenship Education

DESI: Digital Economy and Society Index 2018

DLAP: Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes

ECDL: European Computer Driving Licence

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

IoT: Internet of Things

ISTE: International Society for Technology in Education

LO: Learning Outcome

LOF: Learning Outcomes Framework

MATSEC: Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate

NCF: National Curriculum Framework

NSPCC: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

PSCD: Personal, Social and Career Development

VR: Virtual Reality

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Study

In 1995, Sherry Turkle, a researcher who focuses on the psychology of human relationships with technology, wrote a seminal book called *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (Turkle, 1995). In this key text, she reflected on the ways that the boundaries between people and computers were changing, posing stimulating questions about the relationship between technology and identity. Although Turkle was not the first to explore such questions (Habermas, 1967; Marcuse, 1976; Haraway, 1987), her work reflected a growing concern among scholars from various academic fields and opened up a new field of research, that of interpretive and descriptive studies of human behaviour in digital spaces (Ching & Foley, 2014). Over the years, as technology and new media have become increasingly central to our everyday lives, such questions have been asked by researchers, policy makers and the media. The ubiquity of digital technologies and constant connectivity have brought about new ethical, moral and behavioural concerns which traditional rules and social mores do not address. Undoubtedly, it has vast implications for the education of children, who have been surrounded by digital technologies since the day they were born.

Technology facilitates a number of activities and experiences which are important for youths' cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing. In fact, it has been argued that children and youths have a right to be able to make use of technology to access information and participate actively in society, in order to fully enjoy their rights as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Livingstone & Third, 2017). Young people are avid users of social media, using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram TikTok and Twitter, which are designed to engage with friends and the wider community, gaming community

platforms such as Twitch and Discord, or even private messaging platforms such as Messenger, Signal and WhatsApp. Although social media platforms change, as new platforms are created and some platforms fall out of favour, their functions survive and evolve to become even more central to the way we live our lives. Social media have revolutionised our entire way of communicating and relating with each other and have created numerous opportunities for self-growth and for learning.   Young people are particularly attracted to these platforms, which allow them to communicate with each other and with the wider community, access information, and participate as active citizens in society.

Statement of the Problem

Research shows that young people use the internet and social media on a daily basis. Most Maltese children (98%) have access to the internet (Lauri et al., 2015) and spend over three hours a day online (Smahel et al., 2020). However, being online does not always translate into benefits for young people. Social media platforms have become notorious for facilitating digital sexual abuse, cyberbullying and online hate speech, with young people being both the victims and the perpetrators of such harms.   A survey which asked Maltese 9 to 16-year-olds whether there was anything that happened online which had bothered or upset them in some way during the previous year, showed that 52% of 13 to 14 -year-olds and 50% of 15-16 -year-olds replied in the affirmative. Some of the harms that they encountered were cyberbullying, sexting and online pornography (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020).

Although young people have been brought up with ubiquitous access to digital technologies, they do not always know seem to use them ethically. Thus, it is crucial for them to acquire the necessary skills and values that will enable them to use digital communication platforms in an ethical manner in order to truly reap the benefits afforded by such

technologies. Educational institutions, such as schools, must respond by ensuring that students are supported, and are taught that the traditional moral values such as respect, compassion and empathy should become habitual responses to others, both online and offline. Although this is an important task of society as a whole, policy makers have a particular responsibility to ensure that compulsory schooling addresses this urgent need. This is because education, together with the family, is one of the key institutions that shape the lives of young people. However, unlike the family, educational institutions are subject to constant restructuring. Thus, educational policy makers are well-placed to make evidence-based reforms to the formal and informal curriculum, in the hope that schools will help students make more ethical use of digital communication platforms, both today and in the future.

The idea that education should be concerned with socialising children into the norms of behaviour is not new. In fact, traditionally, this was considered to be one of the main aims of education. The roots of contemporary moral education can be traced to ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, Socrates and Plato (Wren, 2014), as the ancient Greeks believed that "education should be concerned with producing the kaloskagathos (literally, the 'noble and good man'), the person of moral character, the person of integrity, or the morally upright individual" (Barrow, 2007, p. 160). Nowadays, the teaching of some kind of ethical or moral education is considered to be important by most educators around the world. The vast majority of states in the United States (80%), as well as nations such as Canada, Korea and Japan, mandate moral or character education as part of their national curriculum (Nucci et al., 2014).

Most of the debates on moral education have centred on developments that happened in the last century. However, the last twenty years or so have brought new challenges to society due to globalisation and the ubiquitous use of technology and digital communication platforms. These phenomena have made the task of teaching morality an increasingly

complex one, because of the unprecedented diversity of values that characterise this era. Nowadays, people interact with each other not just face-to-face, but also online. Individuals encounter different world views and different lifestyles in online spaces, while they are physically at home or in familiar environments. Globalisation and the increasingly networked world connect us with people from around the globe and allow us to freely interact with them for both business and pleasure. However, this global network can sometimes facilitate unwelcome phenomena, such as online sexual abuse, cyberbullying, hacking, fake news, online hate speech and extremism. Ideally, governments would combat these social ills by regulating the online media environment in order to protect children and youths. However, in practice, regulating online media is extremely complicated because of the global nature of the internet, and the reach of the tech giants. It is further complicated by the fact that regulation often comes at the expense of liberty and free speech. Furthermore, regulating matters of an ethical nature is notoriously difficult due to the contested nature of moral values. The next best way is to focus on the power of education to prepare this generation of students to interact safely, ethically and responsibly in online spaces.

Thus, the next task of moral education in schools is to address emerging ethical issues that the age of technology has brought about, in order to equip students to deal with the increasingly complicated online environments they are interacting in. Although some form of moral education and/or citizenship education features in most school curricula, it does not always reflect the new moral and ethical challenges in digital spaces like social media platforms. For example, the traditional value of empathy has nowadays taken on a new meaning, since the cues that are usually present in face-to-face interactions, which give us feedback on our social exchanges with others, are sometimes missing in the digital context. The lack of social cues can result in a loss of empathy for the other, and lead to abusive behaviour (Suler, 2004). Therefore, in order to foster moral sensitivity, critical thinking and

ethical decision-making in online spaces, schools need to teach digital citizenship, which, in its most basic form, is concerned with teaching children how to make ethical use of technology (Ribble et al., 2004).

The Research Question and Aims of the Research

The overarching research question that guided this study is: How do Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies and new media? This research question is broken down into three sub-questions:

1. According to educators, experts and policy makers, how do unethical uses of digital technologies and new media impinge on the lives of Maltese secondary school students?

2. How do Maltese secondary school policies promote digital citizenship?

3. How does the Maltese secondary school curriculum promote digital citizenship?

Although schools are not the only institutions which contribute to young people's learning, school curricula offer an undeniable opportunity to reach young people in their formative years. Schools have always aimed to teach people how to "live together" (Delors, 1996, p. 14), but nowadays, as technology has made the world indeed a global village, living together has taken on a new meaning. Thus, schools must actively seek to involve students in conversations about values and key ethical debates and how they play out online. Questions such as 'What is truth?', 'What is private?' 'What is public?' and 'How should I behave?' are classical ethical issues, which have now taken on a new meaning as they are applied to digital communication platforms. Hence, this research focuses on how Maltese secondary schools

teach digital citizenship, that is, how they prepare youths to "live together" (ibid.) in an increasingly digital world.

The methodology employed for this study is that of a qualitative case-study approach. The nature of this research required the use of the case-study approach in the study of a very particular context, that is, the teaching of digital citizenship in Malta. The research focuses on the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools, which cater for students who are between 13 and 16 years of age. The research is based on an analysis of the Learning Outcomes Framework and other national syllabi and policy documents, as well as face-to-face interviews with policy makers, heads of schools and teachers. The aim of this research was to first analyse the documents and syllabi in order to map out how schools teach digital citizenship, and then triangulate these data with semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The rationale behind the choice of this approach was that the data obtained from the analysis of these documents and the interviews would shed light on how digital citizenship is taught in Maltese schools. Speaking to experts and policy makers with years of experience, as well as educators (heads of schools, assistant heads of schools and teachers), aimed to enhance the credibility of the findings. The documents were analysed alongside the interviews in order to triangulate the research, that is, to cross-validate the data and capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon.

The participants include a number of experts and policy makers in education, some of whom have been actively involved in the drafting of some of the education policies and subject syllabi. They include the former Minister of Education and Director General of Learning and Assessment Programmes, who were incumbent during the data collection phase, as well as several other experts and policy makers. The heads of schools and teachers explained how the policies and the syllabi were enacted and taught in schools, and whether they were having the desired effect. They also gave their opinions on how the policies and

the syllabi could be improved. This research is particularly timely because Malta is going through a process of curricular reform, and it is hoped that the new syllabi will reflect the new realities that youths are experiencing.

The Maltese Context

Malta is a small country in the Mediterranean which was a British colony until 1964, and is now part of the European Union. Although the island is very small, it has benefited from rapid Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, which, in 2018, was the highest in the European Union (Times of Malta, 2018a), as well as rapid population growth, due to a big influx of foreign workers (Times of Malta, 2018b).

Malta was ruled by the British from 1813 until it gained independence in 1964. This led to very close ties between Malta and the UK, which are reflected in everyday life. The Maltese health and education systems are heavily influenced by the British models, and English is an official language, alongside Maltese. However, one significant difference between the two countries is religion, since the Maltese are predominantly Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic religion is so important to Maltese culture that it is protected by the Constitution of Malta, which proclaims that "the religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion" (Constitution of Malta, 1964).   In light of this fact, it was only recently that Maltese laws were changed to allow for the introduction of divorce, same sex marriage and the legalisation of the morning-after pill. Abortion remains illegal in all circumstances.

Although Malta is still predominantly Catholic, the process of secularisation has been manifesting itself over the last few decades. Following the independence of Malta from British rule, Malta started increasingly relying on tourism as a main source of income, which exposed the local population to new cultures and values. Malta's accession to the European Union in 2003 has led to increasing mobility, both inwards and outwards; in fact, Malta has

had the largest population increase in the EU by far due to migration (European Commission, 2018a). In 2019, it was estimated that a fourth of the population was made up of 'foreigners' (Diacono, 2019). The 2021 census was the first to collect information on sexual orientation, race and religion (Sansone, 2021), but the findings have not yet been published. I have elsewhere argued that the shift in values that this rapid change has brought about has led to tensions between the traditional Maltese citizens and the "New Maltese", that is, the migrants who now call Malta their home (Giordmaina & Zammit, 2019, p. 2).

However, it is not just the migrants who are displaying a shift in values, but also the younger generation of Maltese, whose lives are increasingly being lived online, and are heavily influenced by the values of the influencers, vloggers and gamers whom they follow on their social media channels and in online communities. Data show that over 98 per cent of Maltese children have access to the internet (Lauri et al., 2015) and that Maltese children (9 to 16-year-olds) spend over three hours a day online, which amounts to the second highest amount of time spent online in other EU countries (Smahel et al., 2020). According to the Digital Economy and Society Index 2018 (DESI) published by the European Commission, Malta is the best performing country across the EU in the field of broadband connectivity (European Union, 2018). Not surprisingly, Malta ranks high on the number of internet users, 87% of whom use social media. In fact, this percentage is the highest in Europe, with the EU average being 65%. Recent data show that 82% of people aged 16 and over used Facebook daily in 2021 (Misco, 2021).

Thus, the demographic trends, as well as the contact with other cultures that globalisation has brought about, have contributed to a shift in values, especially in the younger generation. The historical context illustrates the rapid change that has taken place in the last few decades. Although 93.9% still identify themselves as Catholic, church attendance has declined significantly, especially among youths (Sansone, 2018). Although

the Roman Catholic religion is taught in all State schools, a growing number of students are opting out of Religious Education. This is because the both the Constitution (Constitution of Malta, 1964) and the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012a) specify that although Religious Education must be offered to all students in State schools, parents have the option to opt out. In light of this, the curriculum now includes a new subject called 'Ethics', which can be taken as an alternative to the mainstream Religious Education. Although both Ethics and Religious Education are concerned with the teaching of morality, the Ethics curriculum is based on a secular, non-denominational approach, while the Religious Education curriculum is based on the teaching of values from a Roman-Catholic perspective. Although Religious Education and Ethics are the school subjects which are most concerned with the teaching of morality and values, other subjects, such as Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) and Social Studies also play a role in teaching students how to behave responsibly, both online and offline. Thus, digital citizenship, which is concerned with teaching children how to make responsible use of technology, is not a subject in its own right in Maltese secondary schools, but is spread across different syllabi, such as those of Ethics and PSCD.

The Maltese curriculum is underpinned by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). This document, which was enacted into law in 2012, lays out the foundation for the Maltese education system throughout the years of compulsory schooling, from the early years up to secondary schooling (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012a). The NCF sets out the knowledge, skills and values that students should have at the various stages of compulsory schooling. The NCF is complemented by the Learning Outcomes Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2015), an outcomes-based approach to curricula which is currently being rolled-out in Maltese schools. Like the NCF, the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) does not impose syllabi on schools, but lists a number of

learning outcomes based on the knowledge, attitudes and skills that are considered to be the education entitlement of all learners in Malta.

Malta is currently undergoing a period of curricular reform. It is trying to move away from a one-sized fits all type of system to a more diverse curriculum. The LOF breaks away from the old system of high-stakes examinations and moves towards an approach in which continuous assessment is given more value. It promotes learner-centred learning and encourages different forms of continuous assessment, which aims to provide learners with continuous feedback on their progress (Attard Tonna & Bugeja, 2016).

There are three types of schools in Malta. According to the latest statistics, most students attend State schools (58.3%), while 28.3% of students attend Church schools and 13.4% of students attend fee-paying Independent schools (National Statistics Office, 2018). Although there are some differences between schools, all schools are obliged to abide by the NCF and LOF. Although in theory the NCF and LOF allow schools to develop their own syllabi as long as they adhere to the learning outcomes specified in the LOF, in reality, secondary schools follow the syllabi set out by the local examining body (MATSEC). In fact, this is one of the reasons why I chose to focus on secondary schools for this study, because the uniformity of syllabi ensures that the findings related to the curriculum can be generalised to all Maltese secondary schools (years 9 to 11, corresponding approximately to 13 to 16-year-olds).

The participants who took part in this study worked in different schools or contexts. The majority of the teachers worked in State schools, while some worked in Independent schools or Church schools. Three heads or assistant heads of school were interviewed, one from each sector (State, Independent and Church schools). The experts and policy makers worked across all the three sectors, that is, the policies that they drafted (such as the curricula and the syllabi) are relevant to all Maltese secondary schools. This effectively means that

this thesis is a case-study which investigates the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools, and thus, the findings that emerge from this research can be generalised to all Maltese secondary schools.

Significance and Impact of the Study

The concept of digital citizenship is something that societies around the world are currently struggling with. As our worlds are becoming more and more digitally mediated, we encounter new realities such as cyberbullying, online hate speech and sexting. Although schools try to tackle these phenomena proactively by teaching students about acceptable online behaviour, the pace at which digital environments evolve makes it a challenging endeavour. Maltese youths, just like their European counterparts, spend a significant portion of their time online (Lauri & Farrugia, 2019). In fact, a recent EU-wide study found that in 2019, Maltese children aged between 9 and 16 spent the second highest amount of time on the internet on their smartphone or tablet, with over three hours a day, and they were the most likely have negative online experiences (45% compared to the EU average of 25%). Furthermore, 34% were bullied (2nd highest) and 20% admitted to bullying others (also 2nd highest), 26% of all children received sexually explicit messages, while 40% stated that they had seen images, photographs or videos of a sexual nature, 18% have seen hate messages online at least every month, while 22% saw them a few times per year. In spite of this, 21% of children did not confide with anyone when they encountered negative online experiences (Smahel et al., 2020). This figure shows that a significant number of children do not feel empowered to talk to anyone about what they encounter online. This suggests a lacuna in the formal and non-formal education of Maltese youths. This lacuna is further reflected in the dearth of research literature on the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools.

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One of the issues with designing syllabi for teaching digital ethics is that the issues that children and youths are faced with in online spaces are continually changing. In the process of this thesis, I noticed this first-hand. In the preliminary stage of the study, a lot of emphasis was being given to the issue of cyberbullying in schools. In fact, it was one of the first issues to be tackled in schools. Now, the focus of Maltese educators is shifting onto the issue of hate speech. This issue has been making the headlines lately, since online hate speech has become rampant in Malta, with a report describing Maltese social media as "rife with offensive content" (European Union Against Racism and Intolerance, 2018, p. 9). However, the educational system tends to lag behind when it comes to tackling problems that children are clearly grappling with in their online interactions (Council of Europe, 2017).

The findings generated from this study provide valuable insight into how the different subject syllabi deal with the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools, and how schools tackle the topic through other approaches, such as school assemblies or other cross-curricular activities. The findings from this study are informative for policy makers, Heads of College Networks, heads of schools, teachers, teacher-trainers and other educational practitioners. Some of the policy makers and practitioners who are directly involved in the shaping of the Maltese educational system have consented to act as participants in the study. It is hoped that they will have a particular interest in the findings of this research, especially since they have dedicated some of their valuable time to participate in the research. It will also be of interest to practitioners in schools (teachers, curriculum leaders and heads of schools), some of whom have also participated in the study, as well as educators who are involved in initial teacher training and teachers' Continuous Professional Development. The research also addresses a gap in the literature about the teaching of digital citizenship in Malta, since the data on this topic are practically negligible.

Finally, the hope is that this research will benefit a whole generation of Maltese students. The ultimate objective of most research in education is to influence positively the lives of children and youths. Our best hope for a flourishing society is the education of the current generation, since they are the most precious members of our society, as well as its future leaders. If this research were to serve as a small step towards a better education for these students, it would certainly have fulfilled its purpose.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is located at the intersection between the four established fields of cyberpsychology, computer ethics, moral education and digital citizenship. Since this study is concerned with the way that Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies, these four fields offer a good foundation for the issues pertinent to the study.

The first research question focuses on teachers, heads of schools and policy makers' perceptions about how unethical uses of digital technologies affect Maltese secondary school students. Thus, for this research question, I draw on the fields of cyberpsychology and computer ethics. Cyberpsychology is concerned with the psychological processes related to technologically-interconnected human behaviour, that is, how humans and computers interact, both at the individual level and group levels (Krantz, 2019). Cyberpsychologists study phenomena such as risky online behaviour, use of social media, the impact of social media use on empathy and relationships, cyberbullying, the online self, online pornography, and many other topics which are relevant to this study. I consider the work of Suler (2004, 2016) and Turkle (1994, 1995, 2011, 2016, 2022) to be extremely important. These researchers have contributed a lot to the field in recent years, and their work is considered to be seminal. Although I will mostly cite recent research, one cannot ignore the work of Goffman (1959) on the presentation of the self and Erikson (1968) on identity.

One of the major debates in cyberpsychology research is the debate on whether technology is merely a tool that humans use to humans use to enrich and better their lives (the instrumentalist view), or whether technology fundamentally changes, or moulds, its users and their society (the deterministic view)[1]. Stiegler maintains that mankind has always exploited technology, starting with flint tools, moving on to writing tools, up to the advanced technology that underpins modern society, and he believes that people cannot live without technological innovations. However, he warns that technology and new media can have harmful effects on youths and education. To express this duality, he uses the term "pharmacological" for such technologies (Stiegler, 2010, p. 58). The analogy is apt – drugs can be both harmful and beneficial, that is, they can either poison or cure us, depending on which drugs are used, in what dose, and the particular circumstances of the end user. Although misuse and abuse of drugs causes problems all over the world, one must appreciate the overall beneficial effects that drugs bring about. One can argue that it is the same with digital technologies. Like drugs, they have revolutionalised the way we live our lives, and their benefits are now taken for granted. However, they can have harmful effects on particular people, depending on how they are used.

Thus, my position on the use of technology is not that of a sceptic, nor of an advocate. It is more pragmatic in the sense that whether one agrees with it or not, the frequent use of technology by youths has become an established way of life, therefore society needs to understand how youths use digital technologies in order to be able to support them better. Furthermore, I do not position myself as a determinist or instrumentalist in my view of technology. I consider technology to be neither a neutral tool, nor some kind of deterministic force acting on society. This is because technology can never be removed from a particular

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[1] I am using the terms 'deterministic" and "instrumentalist" in the context of a central debate in philosophy of technology. They should not be confused in any way with the terms 'determinism' and 'instrumentalism' in the field of ethical theory.

context, and thus, it can never be neutral. The way that adolescents use the different technologies at their disposal depends a lot on various factors, and the interplay between people's lives and their use of technology is often very complex.

The field of computer ethics is a field of applied ethics which focuses on ethical issues in the design, use and management of digital technologies, as well as the moral and legal challenges that such technologies bring about (Wiener, 1950; Moor, 1985, 2005; Bynum, 2004, Shin, 2008). Moor, a philosopher whose work on policy and conceptual vacuums has established him as one of the pioneers in the field of computer ethics, was one of the first to write about the ethical challenges that new technologies bring about, followed by other notable philosophers, such as Floridi (2007, 2015).

One example of such ethical challenges lies in the use algorithms. Algorithms, which have the ability to sift through huge batches of data to make connections at lightning speed, have made complex tasks such as spam filtering, credit fraud protection and searching for information using search engines possible, and we cannot conceive of modern life without their use. However, they are increasingly being used by companies, governments and healthcare providers to make automated decisions which were previously done by humans, based on the premise that technology can make automated decisions more efficiently and impartially. Algorithms are often used to predict and measure human behaviour, often in rather controversial settings. For example, they are routinely used to predict what consumers are most likely to buy, flag credit scores, measure job performance and provide risk-assessment for insurance purposes. In the US, face recognition software and predictive policing (using data on past crimes to forecast new criminal acts) are often used to solve and prevent crimes. Algorithms are used to extract data about past crimes in order to predict who is more likely to commit crimes and where crimes are more likely to be committed (Lum & Isaac, 2016). However, the ethics of using algorithms in this way are very debatable. In order for algorithms

to work, they rely on a set of data, which they use to make predictions. It is known that algorithms can contain biases and assumptions (algorithmic bias), such as associating drug trafficking with black people (Beckett et al., 2006), or associating cooking, washing and shopping with women (Zhao et al., 2017). This occurs because algorithms reflect the data that are fed into it, so if the data are not sufficiently diverse, the algorithms will amplify racial and gender bias.

The collection and storage of personal data is another potential ethical minefield. Social media platforms such as TikTok have been accused of collecting and using children's personal data, such as telephone numbers, exact locations and biometrical data unlawfully (BBC News, 2021), while Facebook has recently been found to breach EU data privacy laws (BBC News, 2022). Such examples show how new technologies can raise significant ethical issues, which can significantly affect individuals and society. Thus, I find the fields of psychology of technology and computer ethics to be very useful in providing a lens through which I explore the first research question.

The second and third research questions investigate how Maltese secondary school policies and syllabi promote digital citizenship, that is, the ethical use of technology. These two research questions draw on the fields of computer ethics, moral education and digital citizenship. The field of moral education deals with the teaching of morality in schools. Traditionally, it has dealt with topics such as respect for persons and the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982, Noddings, 1984). However, researchers such as Couldry (2010), Vallor (2010, 2016) and Harrison (2010, 2016) have argued for a kind of moral education which focuses on contemporary ethical problems related to the use of technology. This kind of moral education is called digital citizenship education. One of the pioneers of this field is Ribble, who, along with Bailey and Ross, defined it as a way of teaching about "the norms of behaviour with regard to technology use" (Ribble, et al., 2004, p. 7). The term has been adopted by many educational

institutions, such as the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and the Council of Europe (CoE).

The concepts which are particularly important to this study, and which are used as a lens to investigate the three research questions, are John Suler's theory of the Online Disinhibition Effect, Ribble's concept of Digital Citizenship, and to a lesser extent, Moor's theory of Policy and Conceptual Vacuums. I will now describe each of these frameworks in brief, since they will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The Online Disinhibition Effect

Suler's theory of the Online Disinhibition Effect is based on the claim that what people say and do online is often different from how they would behave in face-to-face interactions with others (Suler, 2004, 2016). Suler argues that social constraints and inhibitions are often loosened, or completely abandoned in online interactions, sometimes resulting in aggressive behaviour such as flaming, trolling and hate speech. This is facilitated by anonymity in digital spaces, since using a pseudonym allows users to shield their true identity, giving them ample opportunity to harm and malign others anonymously (ibid.).

Digital Citizenship

Digital Citizenship is a concept which refers to education for ethical and responsible behaviour when using technology. One of the pioneers of digital citizenship is Mark Ribble, who, together with Bailey and Ross, provided one of the first conceptualisations of the term, which they defined as "the norms of behaviour with regard to technology use" (Ribble et al., 2004, p. 7). Over the years, the concept of digital citizenship has become synonymous with any kind of curriculum which is focused on ethical and responsible online behaviour, internet

safety and cyberbullying (Ribble et al., 2004; Council of Europe, 2019; International Society for Technology in Education, 2021; James et al., 2021).

Moor's Policy and Conceptual Vacuums

In 1985, James Moor wrote a seminal paper which discussed the ethical challenges that new technologies pose for humanity. In this paper, he wrote, "Computers provide us with new capabilities and these in turn give us new choices for action. Often, either no policies for conduct in these situations exist or existing policies seem inadequate" (Moor, 1985, p. 266). Moor argued that such policy vacuums are often the result of "conceptual vacuums" (ibid.), which happen when there is a collective lack of understanding of new technologies. Later, in 2005, Moor argued that understanding new technologies is key in order to develop adequate policies which would minimise their negative social impacts, and that we must have "better ethics" (Moor, 2005, p. 117) to deal with such technologies. He presented a hypothesis which states: "As technological revolutions increase their social impact, ethical problems increase" (ibid.). Although initially the field of computer ethics largely attracted computer scientists and philosophers, it now attracts a variety of researchers from different fields, such as law, education and political science.

I found Suler's theory of the Online Disinhibition Effect to be particularly useful when investigating the first research question. Many of the unethical uses of digital technologies, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, revenge porn and online extremism can be explained by this theory. The concepts of digital citizenship and Moor's policy and conceptual vacuums provided a lens through which I explored the second and third research questions, which focus on the extent to which the polices and syllabi in Maltese secondary school promote the ethical use of technology.

Scope of the Study

Given the eclectic nature of this research, it would be impossible to engage with all the scholarship in all the fields that I will be drawing on, and to do justice to the range and complexity of the subject matter. Although selection invariably involves excluding material, I believe I have identified the key writers and their texts and aimed at a representative selection.

This thesis is not intended as a deep and synoptic study of the ethical and social aspects of technology, or of moral education, or of digital citizenship for that matter. My concern is not the technologies as such, nor the digital platforms themselves; these are in any case constantly evolving, and I can provide only a snapshot of the issues raised during their evolution. My intention, rather, is to shed light on how Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies and social media. Furthermore, I do recognise that the researchers whom I cite in this research sometimes make sweeping claims or make arguments that can be contentious. Although I do call attention to these claims or arguments, space sometimes precludes me from providing an extended critical discussion on every occasion.

It is my hope that this research will contribute to an understanding of how the Maltese education system promotes the ethical use of technology. Since this is a newly emerging and quickly expanding field, concerned with teenagers' behaviours in digital spaces, it is virtually impossible to take account of every new contribution to research. One of the main difficulties that I encountered while conducting my research is that there was a continuous stream of new developments that were taking place, both in Malta and internationally. Malta is currently undergoing a process of curricular reform, and this research was started while certain developments were still being discussed. International events, such as the Christchurch bombings, the online harms white paper and the scrutiny on social media platforms also influenced my research. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a great

impact on how young people interact with their peers, extended family, teachers and the wider society. It has undeniably made us rely more heavily on digital communication platforms in all aspects of life and has possibly affected how we relate to others.

Limitations of the Study

All of the data collected in this study were self-reported. The information provided was based exclusively on the perceptions of the participants. Self-reporting can reflect the subject's perceived personality or self-interest, which may bias responses. Although purposeful sampling has enabled me to choose participants with a lot of expertise and experience in Maltese schools, it cannot be assumed that their perceptions are the same as those of all the experts, policy makers and educators in Malta. Consequently, the data collected only reflect the perspectives of these individuals. Also, given that this is a case-study, the findings cannot be transferred to other contexts beyond Maltese secondary schools.

There is one particularly important limitation that I should draw attention to at the outset. The data for the first research question were not collected from the students themselves, but from their teachers, heads of school, experts and policy makers in education. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that the Maltese education system tends to favour a top-down approach to curriculum planning and policy making (Bezzina & Cutajar, 2012; Mifsud, 2017; Bezzina, 2019). Since the educational reform which started in 2006 with the creation of college networks, State schools have become partly decentralised and autonomous. However, as Bezzina notes, "decentralisation and autonomy have only been partially achieved" (Bezzina, 2019, p. 371). Although schools have more autonomy in managing their financial and technological resources than before, schools are still governed by centralised systems of human resources, curriculum and assessment control (ibid.). What this means in practice is that State schools are not free to employ teachers or other members

staff, or choose their own syllabi and methods of assessment. Thus, the syllabi and methods of assessment are set by Education Officers, who form part of the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes. This means that Education Officers and other policy makers are directly responsible for what gets taught in schools and how it is assessed. They are also responsible for teachers' Continuous Professional Development, as well as many education policies. Since they hold this position of power, their views about the impact of digital technologies on students have a direct impact on school policies, syllabi and teacher training. Since the aim of this research is to investigate how Maltese secondary schools promote digital citizenship through the curriculum and school policies, the focus of this research was not the impact that digital technologies have on students, but how the participants' perceptions influence policies, curricula and teaching in schools.

Another reason why I chose not to collect data from students is that it is notoriously difficult to obtain institutional permission to conduct any research about 'taboo' subjects like sexting and pornography among Maltese school children. I was warned by several Maltese academics and educators that asking for institutional permission would be a futile exercise, and would probably delay the collection of research, thus, I made no attempt to do so. In fact, if I had tried to do so, the ethical clearance from the institutional gatekeepers would almost certainly have been withheld and it would have held up the research process. Even if, for some reason, it was granted, collecting such data from students would have probably presented significant logistical difficulties, since I would still have had to gain consent from the heads of schools, parents and students themselves. In fact, as will become evident in the literature review, there is no research on such topics, except for one study which formed part of an EU-wide survey (Smahel et al., 2020). This study was an official collaboration between the EU Kids Online multinational research network and the BeSmartOnline team, as well as the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes (for State schools) and the

Secretariat for Catholic Education (for Church schools). None of the Independent schools agreed to take part in this survey. The official status of this research is probably the reason why the collection of such sensitive data about cyberbullying, sexting, hate speech and pornography was permitted. In fact, the findings of this research will provide the backdrop against which my research will rest.

Thus, the first research question relies on data from educators, experts and policy makers. Although the absence of data from students represents a significant gap, I will show that the data that I have managed to collect amount to a valuable source of evidence in its own right, one which sheds light on the perspectives of the participants, who are instrumental in writing the policies and syllabi, and in promoting digital citizenship in schools. In any case, before investigating how the Maltese secondary school curriculum and policies promote digital citizenship, it was important to talk to educators, experts and policy makers about their views on how Maltese secondary school students use digital technologies and new media, and how unethical uses of such technologies impinge on their lives. The views of these people have a direct impact on how digital citizenship is tackled in Maltese schools, and the data related to the first research question help explain some of the data related to the second and third research questions. Despite this limitation, it must be noted that the main focus of the study is not how Maltese students use digital technologies, or whether they use them ethically, but how the Maltese educational system promotes the ethical use of such technologies.

I will come back to the limitations of this study in Chapter 5.

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

The following conceptual and operational definitions will be used throughout the study. Although some of these terms are sometimes contested, they will be used in the manner outlined below:

Digital technologies are electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate, store or process data (Victoria State Education, 2019). Examples of digital technologies mobile phones and tablets, social media platforms and online games. Emerging digital technologies include Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), Blockchain, drones, Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, 3D printing and Virtual Reality (VR).

New media is an umbrella term for computer-based media, such as video games, the internet and virtual worlds (Oxford Reference, n.d.). It is often used in contrast to 'old' media, which refers to non-interactive media such as newspapers, magazines, books and television.

Social media are forms of electronic communications through which users share information, personal messages, ideas and other content, such as videos (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a). Popular social media platforms include Facebook, TikTok, Twitter and Discord, among others.

Ethics is derived from the Greek word 'ethos', which means 'way of living'. In its simplest form, it is a system of moral principles which guide people in how they make decisions and lead their lives. It is also a branch of philosophy that is concerned with how people behave in society, and is sometimes referred to as 'moral philosophy'. In this thesis, ethics and morality will often be used interchangeably.

Ethical online behaviour means having the skills to participate in online community life in an ethical and respectful way. These include, but are not limited to, respecting people's privacy, feelings and property. Practices such as cyberbullying, revenge porn and

hate speech are clearly unethical because they fail to protect others' privacy and feelings. Other practices, such as sexting and consumption of pornography, are more contentious. Although some people might feel that they are unethical, others might feel that they can be justified. In most of the literature on digital citizenship, the word 'ethical' is often substituted with 'responsible' (Ribble et al., 2004). Thus, in this thesis, these two terms will sometimes be used interchangeably.

Digital citizenship refers to teaching education about the norms of behaviour with regards to the use of technology (Ribble et al., 2004). It is often based on a curriculum which focuses on ethical and responsible online behaviour and internet safety.

Moral panic refers to a false or exaggerated perception that a behaviour or a group of people pose a threat to society's values and wellbeing. The panic is usually initiated by a single event or incident, which is then overgeneralised to create widespread fear or concern about wider issues. This phenomenon is often fuelled by media coverage and consequently intensified by politicians and policy makers (Walsh, 2020). In the context of this thesis, the term 'moral panic' is used to describe a situation of irrational fear or anxiety felt by the public about a particular issue, such as the fear that the use of technology will significantly corrupt young people's values and wellbeing.

Moral education refers to helping students acquire a set of beliefs and values regarding what is right and wrong, obligatory and permissible, and which will influence their attitudes and behaviours towards others. Moral education encourages students to reflect on how they should behave and acquire the dispositions to behave according to their beliefs and values (Halstead, 2015). The teaching of some kind of moral education is present in many national curricula (Nucci et al., 2014).

Curriculum refers to a programme of study. Although the terms 'curriculum' and 'syllabus' are often used interchangeably, in this study, the term 'curriculum' refers to the whole educational programme set out for schools, usually by the government or the state authorities. The curriculum usually lays out a series of minimum standards but does not specify the content which is to be studied in schools. The Maltese curriculum is based on the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012a).

Syllabus refers to a subject-specific list of topics to be studied according to different year groups. Most of the Maltese secondary school subject syllabi are published by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board, which was established in 1991 by the Senate and the Council of the University of Malta.

Thesis Overview

This first chapter served as an introduction to the study, laying out the statement of the problem, research questions and aims of the research. It also tackled the significance of the study by presenting some of the background of the study (the Maltese context), as well as describing the scope and limitations of the study, the theoretical perspectives and conceptual and operational definitions. The second chapter will review the relevant literature related to how young people use technology and social media, the potential harms that they may encounter online, and the educational response to the ethical issues that young people face in digital spaces. Chapter three will present and examine the methodology employed for this study, which relies on the case-study approach, with the analysis of documents and face-to-face qualitative interviews as methods of data collection. Chapter four will present the findings which emerged from the qualitative interviews according to the three research questions. It will also present some background on the Maltese secondary school curriculum, as well as an analysis of some educational policies and syllabi. The fifth chapter will offer an

analysis of the findings, as well as a discussion about their implications for policy makers, school leaders and educators. It will also present the limitations of the study and some recommendations for further research. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the academic research and key debates pertaining to my research questions, to place my study in the context of the existing literature, to identify gaps in this literature, and to address some of these gaps in the remainder of the thesis. The study as a whole aims to investigate how Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies. This chapter will critically assess some of the literature on how young people make use of digital technologies, and how the use of such technologies impacts their moral and social development, as well as literature on how schools attempt to promote the ethical use of technology and new media.

The literature that is reviewed is not limited to research on Maltese secondary school students. As has been explained in the introductory chapter, Malta is a very small country which forms part of the European Union, with a population of around half a million (National Statistics Office, 2022). Thus, the research on the way that Maltese youths use digital technologies and how schools tackle such issues is rather limited. However, the research that is available indicates that the way that Maltese youths use digital technologies is comparable to their peers in other developed countries, such as the US, the UK and other countries in the EU (Lauri et al., 2015; The National Centre for Freedom from Addictions, 2017; Inchley et al., 2020; Smahel et al., 2020).

Section 1: Technology, New Media and Young People

The Ubiquitous Nature of Technology and New Media

When we go online to write an email, send an instant message, log on to our favourite social media platform, attend an online meeting, or buy a product, we enter an environment which moves in parallel with our tangible, physical space. Spatial metaphors such as 'chat rooms', 'online worlds', 'to be on social media' and 'to go online' highlight the way that both worlds intersect, and the constant blurring between the physical and the online worlds reinforce this. For example, online transactions such as banking, shopping and airport check-ins have real world consequences, as do online interactions between people. There is no denying the fact that technologies such as social media, online games, instant messaging apps and video conferencing tools connect people. Terranova (2004) conceives of this "interconnectedness of our communication systems" as something which is not just technological, but also relational and behavioural, that is, our online interactions flow into our "offline" world and affect the way we behave and relate to each other; or as she eloquently puts it, "It is a tendency of informational flows to spill over from whatever network they are circulating in and hence to escape the narrowness of the channel and to open up to a larger milieu" (Terranova, 2004, p.2).

Jurgenson (2012a) also contends that digital technologies merge the physical and the digital worlds, and in the process create a kind of "augmented reality". He uses this term to refer to the larger conceptual framework that views "our reality as the byproduct of the enmeshing of the on and offline" (Jurgenson, 2012a, p. 84). He makes reference to the Arab Spring, the 2011 London riots, the Occupy movement and other protests and "flash-mobs", which he describes as "massive gatherings of digitally-connected individuals in physical space" (ibid., p. 83) to make his point that the "virtual" and the "real" are intertwined.

Jurgenson coined the term "digital dualism" to refer to the common discourse that the online, digital world is virtual, while the offline, physical world is the real world. He argues that this is a false dichotomy, because what happens online has become so enmeshed in "real life" that it no longer makes sense to talk about the two worlds as two separate realms (Jurgenson, 2012b), since technologies such as geo-tagging, street view and face recognition impact, and are in turn impacted, by the physical world that they operate in. People interact with each other in both the physical and the digital world, with their online and offline interactions often blending seamlessly into each other.

This constant connectivity is a relatively recent phenomenon, but it is one that has taken hold rapidly. Smartphone owners interact with their phones an average of 85 times a day, including immediately upon waking up, just before going to sleep, and even in the middle of the night (Perlow, 2012; Andrews et al., 2015). A survey of American teenagers (13 to 17-year-olds) showed that 95% of teenagers have access to a smartphone, while 45% of them report that they are almost constantly online (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). A recent survey of Maltese middle and secondary school students (11 to 15-year-olds) indicated that 35% of 13-year-olds and 38% of 15-year-olds have constant contact with close friends online (Inchley et al., 2020). Although such numbers might be inflated due to errors related to self-reporting, it is evident that the use of technological devices and social media has increased dramatically.   In fact, one can say that children's lives have become "digital by default" (Stoilova et al., 2020, p. 198). The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown in many countries in Europe and around the world have brought to the fore our reliance on digital technologies for work, communication, access to services, education and leisure. It has also highlighted the disparity between those who are well connected and others who have limited access to digital technologies, such as people who live 'off the grid', those who cannot afford

broadband and mobile technologies, or those who do not possess the skills which allow them to connect with others digitally.

The philosopher of technology Luciano Floridi coined the term "onlife" to describe how developments since the beginning of the 21st century have eroded the differences between the offline and the online worlds, such that our concepts of 'virtual life' and 'real life' are increasingly blending into each other (Floridi, 2007, p. 62). In *The Onlife Manifesto* (2015), which is based on research conducted in 2012, Floridi and other researchers discuss the question: What does it mean to be human in a hyperconnected era? (Floridi, 2015). They suggest that the omnipresence of information and communication technologies has required us to rethink fundamental concepts about society. The message of the manifesto is that Information and Communication Technologies are not merely tools that we use in our day-to-day lives, but environmental forces that are increasingly affecting our self-conception (who we are), our interactions (how we socialise), our conception of reality (our metaphysics) and our interactions with reality (our agency).

Floridi's concerns chime with those of McLuhan, who lived from 1911-1980, well before the age of the internet and the digital technologies that nowadays we take for granted. However, when he started writing about technology (in the 1950s), the world was on the cusp of the electronic age. He believed that the new electronic media of the time, namely radio and television, were radically altering the way people thought, felt and acted. His famous book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) is considered to be a revolutionary study in media theory. In this seminal book, McLuhan claimed that the content and the media through which it is presented are inevitably interwoven. Over time, the media becomes more important than the content that it hosts. With prolonged use of a particular medium, the medium itself moulds our perceptions. Thus, he believed that media are not neutral, but transformational; that is, they have the power to change both individuals and

society (McLuhan, 1964). In an article about McLuhan, Culkin summed up McLuhan's ideas about technology as follows: "We shape our tools and thereafter they shape us. These extensions of our senses begin to interact with our senses. These media become a massage" (Culkin, 1967, p. 70). Although at that point in time the internet did not exist and McLuhan was talking about earlier technologies, namely the television set, it seems particularly prescient now that new forms of media have permeated our everyday lives, and digital technologies provide constant connectivity.

In fact, for most youths, and indeed, for most people in the first world, their 'real life' relationships weave in and out of online interactions. Let us consider social gatherings as an example of this. When organising a party, hosts usually start by sending digital party invitations, either via social media or through private messages. The practice of sending printed invitations via postal mail, or 'snail mail', is usually reserved for more formal events. The party guests often discuss what to wear to the party and what gifts to buy for the host either in face-to-face conversations, over the phone, or in private group chats. The gifts can be purchased either from a brick-and-mortar shop, purchased online with home delivery, or purchased as an online voucher and sent directly to the host. During the party itself, guests can interact with each other face-to-face, or hold online conversations with each other or with others who are not at the party. They can also follow the news, check the weather or the newsfeeds on their smartphones. The guests might take photos and videos and upload them on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok or other social media platforms, where other people can 'like' them or comment on them. When the party is over, everyone can gossip and rehash salient moments, either face-to-face, or a combination of both. During the first lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it even became common to host 'Zoom parties', in which people interacted socially via Zoom, a video-conferencing platform.

Thus, the terms 'real' and 'virtual' have become rather outdated when used in the context of technology, since reality and virtuality have become totally enmeshed in most aspects of modern life. Consequently, in this thesis I will be using the terms 'online' and 'face-to-face', which are more neutral and do not give the impression that online interactions are any less real than those which occur face-to-face. In fact, as Terranova (2004) and Jurgenson (2012a, 2012b) have pointed out, our online interactions with each other have very real consequences, both for ourselves and for others.

The Self and Identity in Online Spaces

In her earlier work, Turkle (1995) embraced a postmodernist concept of the self in a constant state of flux. She focused on the positive aspects of this phenomenon, highlighting "the ability of the Internet to change popular understandings of identity" and arguing that on the internet, "We are encouraged to think of ourselves as fluid, emergent, decentralized, multiplicitous, flexible, and ever in process" (Turkle, 1995, pp. 263-264). Turkle examined the implications of MUDs (multi-user dimensions) and other online domains such as chat rooms for identity play. She argued that online environments permit users to engage in identity play, that is, the possibility to have more than one identity, or to experiment with different aspects of one's identity. She suggested that "technology is bringing a set of ideas associated with postmodernism... into everyday life"

(Turkle, 1995, p. 18). For Turkle, the focus was squarely on the multiplicity and fragmentation of selves, and she believed that online environments allow users to construct every aspect of their identity, even something as fundamental as their gender.[2]

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[2] In her later work, Turkle (2011, 2016) abandons her optimism about online life, and instead, focuses on its more negative aspects. Turkle's later work will be discussed later on in this thesis.

Digital spaces can undoubtedly be a way for humans to experiment with their gender and sexuality. The anonymity of virtual social worlds gives individuals absolute control over the construction and portrayal of their identities. This phenomenon is especially evident in multi-player role-playing games, in which a suspension of disbelief is assumed to be the norm and individuals often perform roles which are very different from their online identities. This is reminiscent of Goffman's seminal work on identity, in which he perceives the self as a series of performances. For Goffman (1959), the self is how we present ourselves in our everyday life; however, it relies on particular relationships and social contexts:

> When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the tasks that he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. (Goffman, 1959, p. 28)

Social networking platforms and online multi-user worlds, or as they are often called, MUDs (multi-user dimensions), provide the perfect opportunity for different kinds of identity play. The social nature of such environments allows for interaction between people all over the world, and users of such environments often do so with the use of pseudonyms. Thus, there is plenty of opportunity for individuals to take on different personas, such as pretending to be older or younger than they actually are, or pretending to be of a different gender, race or social class. The absence of face-to-face cues such as facial expressions, physical appearance, voice and body movements, as well as other social indicators such as clothes and hairstyles, allows users to explore new aspects of their self, including experimenting with gender.

While different forms of identity play can be practised by users of all ages, it is thought that this process can be particularly beneficial for young people who are

experimenting with their identity in order to find their sense of self (Erikson, 1968). Thus, adolescents, whose sense of self has not yet been established, can find online spaces particularly conducive to the sort of identity play that goes on in real life, aided by the anonymity of the internet. They can use such spaces to experiment with new facets of their identity, as well as to become more secure with their actual offline identity. Turkle (1995) explained how MUDs supported Erikson's concept of the "adolescent moratorium":

> The adolescent moratorium is a time of intense interaction with people and ideas. It is a time of passionate friendships and experimentation. The moratorium is not on significant experiences but on their consequences…The moratorium facilitates the development of a core self, a personal sense of what gives life meaning. This is what Erikson called identity. (Turkle, 1995, p. 204)

> However, Turkle's conclusion points to a flaw in her argument. She assumes that what happens online remains online, and that online experimentation has no repercussions on 'real life'. Although this may have been true (to a certain extent) in 1995, it is certainly not the case now.

The earlier Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) research focused on groups of users who were predominantly white and came from middle class backgrounds, being the relatively privileged few who had access to computers and internet connections at the time. In fact, as Lüders (2010) has pointed out, Turkle, whose work was so influential, only focused on a rather limited sample of internet users. However, nowadays most young people living in the global North have access to digital technology, not just the privileged few, and constant connectivity is nearly ubiquitous. Thus, the difficulty with identity exploration is that it has become increasingly difficult to control who has access to it. The real danger of 'context collapse' is when identity exploration in one context is witnessed by users in another

context, such as university admissions officers or employers who search through prospective candidates' social media profiles (boyd, 2014).

Many researchers have rejected the distinction between 'virtual' and 'real' selves, or rather, the online versus the offline selves. Ess (2011) maps out the CMC research since the 1990's. He explains that although the first few years of scholarly research focused on this dualism, "the cumulative judgment of many leading CMC researchers by the end of the first decade of this century is that the virtual/real distinction is no longer relevant to CMC research" (Ess, 2011, p. 4).

As technology became increasingly widespread, more contemporary CMC research reflects the ubiquitous nature of technology and explores the almost total blurring of online and offline identities and its implications (Terranova, 2004; Jurgenson, 2012a, 2012b; Floridi, 2015). One salient question that comes to mind is, are today's young people, who were born and raised in the age of technology, able to switch off, or maintain separate identities in their online and offline worlds, or have their online and offline identities morphed into each other?

Howard Gardner and Katie Davis (2014) found that today's generation, which they call "The App Generation", rarely distinguishes between their online and the offline selves. In fact, youths go to great pains to present an online "socially desirable, polished self" (Gardner & Davis, 2014, p. 63). This public online self is what they permit others to see, just like when people use clothes, make-up and so on to present a better version of themselves to the public in face-to-face appearances. Goffman coined the phrase "impression management" in 1959 to illustrate how we act in order to get the approval of others. As explained earlier, he wrote about the presentation of the self as an act of "everyday performance", in which we actively participate in directing and controlling the impression we give of ourselves, effectively putting on masks in front of others depending on this situation (Goffman, 1959, p. 28). Thus, according to Goffman, people portray their lives as a kind of theatrical

performance. The problem with this is that with the amount of time that we spend online, our public performance takes up a big chunk of our daily lives. Thus, it is not unreasonable to wonder if today's generation find it difficult to maintain an offline, private self.

In their ethnographic study of a class of 13 to 14- year-old students in a secondary school based in London, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) found that teenagers who were in the same class at school were connected both online and offline with each other, and their online interactions enhanced their offline relationships, as they constantly weaved in and out of online and offline exchanges. They also connected with other members of different communities that they formed part of, such as family, ethnic communities and even gaming communities. One of the biggest strengths of Livingstone and Sefton-Green's study is the robustness of the data, which were collected over a whole year of immersion into the lives of a class of secondary school students and take into consideration the students' views, as well as those of their parents and their teachers. The researchers studied the students in school, at home, in their neighbourhood and in their online spaces, in order to research how young people connect with each other, both online and offline, and how they make sense of their identities.

Unfortunately, there is scant data on how Maltese adolescents use social media use to manage their identities and the way they portray themselves to others. One of the few research studies on this topic was conducted by Farrugia et al. (2019) as part of a bigger study by the EU Kids Online network (Smahel et al., 2020), which was mentioned earlier. This study collected qualitative data from four focus groups and four individual interviews about Ask.fm, a social networking site which, until a few years ago, was very popular with Maltese youths. One of the salient features of this platform was its question-and-answer format which encouraged users to ask each other questions anonymously, and which could also be cross-posted on Facebook and other social networking sites. Ask.fm had a reputation for

facilitating cyberbullying and has been associated with teenage suicides in the UK, Ireland and the US (Abad-Santos, 2013; Blake, 2015), as well as a very high-profile case of a Maltese teenager who was found dead at the bottom of Dingli Cliffs after being cyberbullied on the website (Malta Independent, 2014a); however, this did not dent its popularity with Maltese youths (Malta Independent, 2014b). The authors of this study hypothesize that the platform's popularity with Maltese youths could be attributed to the small size of the Maltese islands, which affords little opportunities for anonymity. The adolescent participants in the study reported that the question-and-answer format allowed them to get to know themselves better and to receive valuable feedback about what people thought of them. They also saw it as an opportunity for their friends and prospective friends to get to know them better. Although they seemed aware of the dangers of anonymity, they were willing to take risks in order to reap the benefits of identity exploration. As the authors themselves note, one of the limitations of this study stemmed from the fact that the data were collected with the aim of understanding Maltese youths' online activity, with no specific focus on Ask.fm. However, it could also count as one of the study's strong points, because the lack of focus on Ask.fm could have made the participants less guarded in their answers about the platform. The authors conclude that:

> Anonymity on Ask.fm is a double-edged sword for adolescents. It is appealing: It gives the users the possibility to explore their identity through social interaction. They can make use of anonymity as an opportunity to get feedback about themselves and others, which they would not get or give in a more traditional context. These are all important aspects of identity development occurring in an online context. However, this opportunity also exposes them to other risks, as anonymity is often used for insulting and abusing others on this platform… Anonymity can be both a useful and a powerful method for teens to deal with identity development. The fact that awareness

of potential risks does little to negate indulgence implies that, in their quest for exploration, adolescents sacrifice safety for thrill seeking. (Farrugia et al., 2019, p.752)

In contrast to Ask.fm, Facebook and some other social media networks encourage users to divulge more information about their real identities through the use of personal profiles, which typically include names, photos, location, occupation, relationship status, a list of 'friends' and other personal information such as favourite films or books. Highly curated profiles promote favourable self-presentation by allowing users to decide which aspects of their lives to emphasize, downplay or even leave out completely. Self-expression is very much encouraged by digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat, sometimes prompting a degree of oversharing or inappropriate self-exposure. Even video games have jumped on the bandwagon, offering 'skins' for avatars and sometimes letting users create 'mods' (modifications) and enhancements to gain in-game status.   Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok have allowed normal people to become popular almost overnight; in fact, all it takes is for a video or photo to go viral for a normal person to become a celebrity. Celebrities have taken full advantage of this phenomenon, sharing the most intimate details of their lives via 'selfies'.

Twitter called 2014 "The Year of the Selfie" (BBC Trending, 2014). The word was first used in 2002, when it was used in an Australian online forum post, but in 2013, it was named as the Oxford Dictionaries 'Word of the Year' (Killingsworth, 2013). "Selfie" is defined as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). A 2018 Pew Research Center Poll found that 45% of teenagers reported that they often or sometimes post selfies on social media, with 29% of them admitting that they regularly post things that they want to go viral (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). According to a UK report on girls and young

women's lives commissioned by Girlguiding, a survey of over 2000 girls and young women between the ages of 11 and 21 showed that almost half of them (48%) use apps and filters on their photos to make themselves look better. Over a third of them (34%) will not post a photo of themselves unless they change aspects of their appearance, and 39% of 11- to 21-year-olds reported that they feel unhappy that they do not actually look the way they look online (Girlguiding, 2020).

Modern technologies, such as social media, digital cameras and apps which digitally enhance photos have allowed ordinary people to present a well-curated self, which is a kind of 'performance' for the public, often called 'personal branding'. The aim of personal branding is to increase social status and in turn, improve relationship and work prospects. Gardner and Davis (2014) call this personal branding exercise "the packaged self", arguing that adolescent social media users often regard themselves as objects of value to others, neatly packaged and presented on social media. They found that adolescents coming from higher-income families dedicated a lot of effort to presenting themselves in ways that would appeal to college admission officers and employers, while those coming from lower-income families tended to emulate celebrities on YouTube and reality TV. This finding probably reflects the pressures on adolescents. It seems to indicate that the children of higher-income families might feel pressured to gain access to good schools and jobs, while those of lower-income families are inundated with celebrity culture and perceive it as a way of obtaining status and money. This phenomenon mirrors Goffman's theory of the presentation of the self as a "performance", which was discussed above. Gardner and Davis argue that modern technologies such as smartphones and apps capitalise on the individualism and self-focus that adolescents exhibit and facilitate this performance, or "packaging of the self" by making it easy to take photos, enhancing them and uploading them on social media. The apps also provide an instant measure of social influence (Gardner & Davis, 2014, p. 63).

Social media provide users with a global audience, much bigger than that of their everyday friends and acquaintances. Images, videos and text which are shared on social media can attract a lot of attention, or 'feedback' in the form of 'likes', 'followers' or comments. Such feedback can easily be measured and is often believed to be a gauge of one's worth, especially by youths who have been conditioned by social media to equate value with popularity, or 'celebrity status'. Young people are particularly attracted to such ways of measuring worth. They often go to great lengths to find out what others think of them, continually experimenting with new and different aspects of their identity. The feedback that they receive by peers, both online and face-to-face, is internalised and becomes part of their identity. Erikson (1950) describes this stage of psychosocial development as the identity versus confusion stage, during which adolescents between approximately 12 to 18 years of age develop a sense of self and personal identity. According to Erikson, during this stage, the feedback that society gives adolescents on their experimentation with different identities will contribute towards a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. Those who are not allowed to explore and experiment with their identity will remain insecure and confused (Erikson, 1950). Thus, what young people are doing online is quite consistent with established models of human personality and identity development, such as that proposed by Erikson. The only risk is that their limited capacity for self-regulation and vulnerability to peer pressure leaves young people exposed to certain risks as they "navigate and experiment with social media, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, sexting, depression, privacy concerns and influence of advertisements on buying behaviour" (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 800).

In spite of the prevalence of technology in the life of adolescents, little exists in the literature about how their evolving online presence affects their identity formation. Most youths have adapted to using technology in their everyday lives, making sense of its

complexity in ways that are not always immediately apparent. They often try to balance the urge to highlight their positive attributes on social media with presenting a more realistic account of themselves, especially when their families, friends and potential partners have access to their posts. Although it is relatively easy to misrepresent oneself online, juggling these 'lies' or 'inaccuracies' is far from easy, especially when there is context collapse, in the form of family members, teachers or employers who are following you on social media.

Although this research does not specifically set out to investigate how Maltese youths navigate their sense of self and identity on social media, it does aim to shed light on the perceptions of policy makers, experts and educators about the impact of digital technologies and social media on the lives of students. Thus, after considering the impact of technology on youth's sense of self and identity, I will now focus on the impact on their relationships with others.

Is Technology Making us less Empathetic?

Digital communication platforms such as social networking platforms, online gaming platforms and online conferencing apps can increase our sense of connection with others while allowing us to be physically apart. This has proven to be essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it seems like online interactions are set to increase in the future. The question is, can this connection successfully replace face-to-face encounters, or does it have a negative impact on our relationships with others?

Turkle, who was so enthusiastic about online worlds as "identity workshops" in 1994 (Turkle, 1994, p. 158), has reconsidered her position in order to reflect the new reality. In *Alone Together: Why Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2011), she argues that when we spend hours in an online game or a virtual world, we distance ourselves from real life. As a result, our relationships with others suffer as we favour online

interactions over face-to-face communication. Turkle now believes that modern technologies allow us to keep people at a distance, and we often keep in touch with hundreds of people but never make the time to forge deep connections with them. She describes technology as a "phantom limb" which teenagers carry on their person all the time, and which lets them connect with peers all day, but only superficially. She writes:

> I once described the computer as a second self, a mirror of mind. Now the metaphor no longer goes far enough. Our new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology. (Turkle, 2011, p. 16)

In a more recent book, Turkle (2016) expands on this idea. She argues that we are losing the art of conversation, and along with it, our sense of empathy. We make more acquaintances, but our relationships with them are often rather superficial. Thus, as we spend more time online, we spend less time in face-to-face encounters with others, losing practice in the empathic arts, that is, learning how to make eye contact and listening to others.

Although Turkle's work is considered to be seminal, Bugeja made this same argument in 2005, much earlier than Turkle. Bugeja laments the fact that we are spending more time in our online world than in real life, interacting with our online communities more than our real ones. He observes that people using gadgets "are spending more time apart from each other and their friends and neighbours" (Bugeja, 2005, p. 15). Furthermore, he expresses concern about the fact that we are neglecting our primary relationships and our sense of self, resulting in a sense of isolation: "we have forgotten how to respond ethically, emotionally and intellectually to the challenges, desires and opportunities of life at home and at work" (Bugeja, 2005, p. 82). Bugeja considers the effect that communication technology has on our consciousness, our relationships and communities. He warns that the fact that children no longer play in their neighbourhood parks, instead spending most of their time at home in their

online environments, is detrimental to their wellbeing. Bugeja argues that the physical community, which is characterized by schools, neighbourhoods, towns, home and places of work, is key to developing a moral and ethical society, because it is only through face-to-face meetings that we can communicate effectively. Of course, one cannot claim that all children spend most of their time indoors. However, research on Maltese children (Smahel et al., 2020), which will be explored in more detail later on, does seem to bear this out.

In their criticism of online interactions, both Bugeja and Turkle replicate the dichotomy between the 'real' and the 'virtual'. However, it must be noted that it is only recently that digital technologies have become so enmeshed in our day to day lives. Thus, these distinctions might have been more apt when Bugeja and Turkle were writing about the differences between face-to-face and online interactions. Other researchers (Small & Vorgan, 2009; Konrath et al. 2011; Twenge, 2017) also believe that spending time online reduces our capacity to empathise with others. They argue that modern life, with its reliance on technology, has made us less empathetic. Empathising with others requires deep attention to their needs, their feelings and their facial expressions, therefore it is not completely far-fetched to assume that less face-to-face time with others might lead to a decrease in empathy.

Historically, 'empathy' has been defined in a number of ways. Some researchers such as Borke (1971) and Hogan (2016) have defined it in cognitive terms, that is, when one can discern the emotional or cognitive status of other people; often described as 'perspective taking'. However, many psychologists define empathy in more affective terms, specifically the sensations and feeling we get in response to the feelings or the plight of others (Olden, 1958; Stotland, 1969; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972; Underwood & Moore, 1982, Batson, 2009). Thus, cognitive empathy involves an intellectual understanding of what others are going through, while affective empathy is associated with actually feeling and caring about others.

In a series of conversations with Donskis, Bauman (2013) refers to a loss of empathy, or an indifference to the plight of others, which he calls "adiaphora". He claims that virtual life is eroding human compassion and sensitivity due to the "sadistic language and mental cannibalism lurking in anonymous online chats and deeply offensive comments that are meant to hurt and discourage those who are visible and who expose themselves" (Bauman & Donskis, 2013, p. 38), which he blames on the mass media:

> Incessant political scandals similarly diminish or entirely take away people's social and political sensitivity. For something to agitate society, it must really be unexpected or downright brutal. Thus inevitably mass society and mass culture adiaphorize us. Not just politicians but insensitive individuals whose social nature and attention are awakened only by sensational and destructive stimuli are in large part the result of the media. Stimulation becomes a method and a way of self-realization. Things turned into a routine do not turn anybody on – one needs to become a star or a victim to gain any sort of attention from one's society. As you have observed, only a celebrity and a famous victim can expect to be noticed by a society overstuffed with sensational, valueless information. (Bauman & Donskis, 2013, p. 38)

Borba (2017), an educational psychologist, also believes that a kind of moral numbness is on the rise, particularly in the Western world. Borba claims that this generation of youths are considerably less empathetic than the generations that came before them. She believes that today's generation is more narcissistic than any previous generation. One of the most striking features of people with narcissistic personality disorder is a lack of empathy. Borba blames this on today's self-absorption epidemic, which she calls the "Selfie Syndrome". She believes that empathy is key to developing a moral identity, and states that this decline in empathy is particularly troubling for society (Borba, 2017, p.15).

Of course, these are large, controversial claims, which are often contested. For example, is it really the case that going online affects empathy? Although being online does not decrease empathy inherently, it could contribute to the decline of empathy. The idea that virtuality undermines empathy underpins John Suler's theory of the "online disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004, p. 321). Suler argues that what people say and do online is often different from how they would behave in face-to-face interactions with others (Suler, 2004). He maintains that online interactions often feature a lack of restraint, as social constraints and inhibitions are often loosened, or completely abandoned. Online spaces facilitate anonymity, since using a pseudonym allows users to shield their true identity, giving them an opportunity to harm and malign others anonymously. This form of anonymity allows users to separate from in-person identity and moral agency, effectively allowing them to disassociate themselves from their behaviour. The disinhibition effect is amplified by the fact that, when interacting behind a screen, users tend not to be visible to each other, missing out on the non-verbal cues of disapproval from each other. Suler compares this kind of interaction to a session of psychoanalysis, in which the analyst sits behind the patient in order to encourage the patient to discuss freely, without being affected by the visible reactions of the analyst. According to Suler, the asynchronicity of some online communication compounds this effect. In most cases, one can post a hostile message and then delay dealing with the immediate reactions to it, or even in some cases, refuse to deal with the repercussions. Online users can also disassociate themselves from those they are communicating with online by effectively dehumanising them, perceiving them as fictional characters in some kind of make-believe world (ibid.).

According to Suler, such disinhibition can be either benign or toxic. Benign manifestations of the online disinhibition effect include efforts to improve self-understanding and personal development, exploring new aspects of one's identity, or resolving conflicts

with others. On the other hand, toxic manifestations of disinhibition can result in harassment or bullying others. Although Suler's theory is well-established, it must be noted that more modern forms of communication tend to be less conducive to the online disinhibition effect than older forms of digital communication. For example, platforms which feature video communication allow users to see each other, removing some of the features of anonymity, asynchronicity and lack of non-verbal communication. Furthermore, some instant messaging platforms have tools which allow users to check whether their message has been read by the recipient, which discourages delays between reading a message and replying to it. Finally, many users use emojis (graphical representations of emotions) to introduce some of the emotional cues to make up for the lack of non-verbal communication.

Konrath's review of personality traits in the era of the internet shows declines in some personality variables, including empathy (Konrath, 2013). Earlier research by Konrath et al. (2011) showed that college students' empathy scores have declined in the last 30 years, with an especially steep drop in the last decade. The conclusions of this research support those of Twenge et al.'s study (Twenge et al., 2012), which found that students' narcissism has peaked during this same period. These findings are also consistent with those of Turkle (Turkle, 2011, 2016, 2021), as well as those of Small and Vorgan (2009). Konrath et. al (2011) suggest that this decline in empathy could partly be due to increased social isolation, coupled with the effects of social media and the increased focus on the self. Furthermore, they suggest that the more time youths spend online, the less time they have to engage in deep relationships with others. This claim is based on the assumption that going online reduces both the quality and the quantity of face-to-face conversation with others. Facial expressions, eye contact, tone inflections and body language, which certainly aid in reading the emotions of others, are missing from texts, instant messages and social networking conversations, although they feature in video chatting.

Although young people's levels of empathy seem to be decreasing, at this point in time, views about the causes seem to be speculative at best. None of the researchers mentioned above can definitively say what it is exactly that is eroding empathy. In fact, some researchers claim the opposite - that being online can actually increase empathy in some cases. For example, Carrier et al. (2015) studied the impact of spending time online on real-world empathy. They concluded that going online "does not displace face-to-face time nor reduce real-world empathy" and in fact, "virtual empathy was positively correlated with real-world empathy" (with a caveat that playing video games had negative effects on empathy) (ibid., p. 39). Their work builds on earlier work, such as that of Caplan and Turner (2007), who argued that being online can support or even increase empathetic behaviour like comforting others, since virtual environments such as social media facilitate access to people in similar situations.

Furthermore, since teenagers are so used to weaving seamlessly in and out of online and offline spaces, one cannot assume that their online interactions are necessarily reducing their empathy with their peers. Although it might be true in some cases, the reality is probably more nuanced than it has been made out to be. For example, in the ethnographic study mentioned above, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) found that "online communication seemed to reinforce (rather than undermine) the importance of relationships with family and local friends built primarily through face-to-face communication" (Livingstone & Sefton- Green, 2016, p. 84). In another ethnographic study about the use of technology in schools, this time in an Australian secondary school, Selwyn et al. (2018) found that teenagers often use technology in unexpected ways, such as for peer support. They found that students sometimes helped other students who were unable to attend a class by sending updates and organise themselves into groups to write notes collaboratively via such as GoogleDocs. This shows that adolescents can use the tools which are at their

disposal to strengthen their peer relationships. In fact, in some cases, social media may help

to forge new relationships, such as those based on shared interest, rather than geographical

proximity.   It can also be instrumental to new romantic relationships. A US study by

Lenhart et al. in 2015 found that 8% of teenagers had dated partners that they had initially

met online and over 50% had engaged in online flirting with potential partners (Lenhart et al.,

2015). Over the last few years, the number of teenagers who have found romantic partners

online has probably increased. A small-scale qualitative study of Canadian teenagers during

the COVID-19 pandemic found that even before the pandemic, many Canadian teenage

couples had met each other online, and this was further intensified during the pandemic. The

participants suggested that before the pandemic, meeting online and then meeting up in

person was considered to be the norm, but during the pandemic, many teenage relationships

moved entirely into online spaces (Goldstein & Flicker, 2020).

Boyd (2014) argues that the reason why youths spend so much time online is due to

parental restrictions on their freedom, rather than their preference for virtual interactions.

According to her research, contemporary teenagers' lives are "complicated" partly because

they have less freedom than their counterparts used to have in the past. They are often

"policed" by their parents, banned from shopping malls and discouraged from using public

transport without an adult in charge, so often, their only chance to "hang out" is by using

social media. boyd downplays the negative aspects of digital media, arguing that most of the

challenges faced by teenagers stem from other causes. She states that social media provides

"opportunities for house-bound teens to socialize and people-watch, but it also provides an

opportunity to relax" (boyd, 2014 p. 91), arguing that social media help adolescents to

explore aspects of maturation such as self-presentation, managing social relationships, and

understanding the world around them. Furthermore, she believes that social media are crucial

to teenagers' quest for popularity and status, because they allow information to spread easily

and provides teenagers with the tools to keep up with the schools' ever changing social dynamics. Although boyd admits that social media are often used to spread malicious gossip, she seems to suggest that gossip is a normal part of teenagers' lives and she does not equate it with bullying. She asserts that although the technology serves to make true cases of bullying more visible, it is not the technology itself that makes it cruel and damaging, and in fact, "teens consistently report that they experience greater stress when they are bullied at school" (boyd, 2014, p. 133). In fact, in her book, she makes no mention of cyberbullying, and dismisses most bullying as "teenage drama" (ibid, p. 136), without considering teenagers who have been bullied and who have subsequently taken their own lives, or been psychologically damaged by the bullying.

These contrasting views on whether technology has an effect on empathy suggest that blaming complex social phenomena on technology is rather problematic, because ultimately, how humans use technology varies a great deal. Although technology has the power to influence children and young people's lives, it is certainly not the only thing that can do so. One reason that we condemn technology is that it is often viewed as a monolith, but in fact, there are a myriad of ways in which it can be used. For example, there is a big difference between using instant messaging apps and using video chats to communicate. Whereas messaging apps rely mostly on text and emojis to pass on a message, video calling technologies offer a much richer experience which incorporates synchronous video and sound. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that such technologies can help to keep people in touch with their loved ones, their work colleagues, potential romantic partners and their friends in the absence of face-to-face meetings. Although endless hours of video calling can take their toll, prompting the slang term "Zoom fatigue" (Sklar, 2020), it must be acknowledged that the effects of the pandemic on our work, education and relationships

would have been completely different if we had not been able to use the tools afforded by digital technologies.

While the data for this research were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, the trend towards connecting with others virtually had already been well-established. Although this was not the main aim of the research, through the interviews with the various educators and policy makers, this study sheds some light on how Maltese youths interact with each other in online spaces, and how this interaction affects their relationships at school. As pointed out earlier, there is very little research about Maltese students' use of technology and social media, and there is even less research on how Maltese schools deal with some of these issues.

In this first section, I have reviewed some of the literature on the impact of technology and new media on youths' self and identity, as well as their relationships with others.   This section focused on the fact that this generation of youths has grown up surrounded with technology, in fact it is ubiquitous and central to how young people communicate with others. The data show clearly that Maltese youths make frequent use of digital technologies and social media to connect with friends (Inchley et al., 2020). Although this is not concerning in itself, the question is whether such regular use of digital technologies impact youths' perceptions of their selves and identities and their sense of empathy with others. As discussed earlier, Suler's (2004) theory of the Online Disinhibition Effect claims that when interacting with others in digital spaces, people tend to have reduced empathy for others. This theory focuses on the possibility of anonymity on social media and the potential to cause harm to others. Much has been written on online harms such as cyberbullying, sexting, online pornography, online hate speech and extremism, which, unarguably, have become an intrinsic part of some teenagers' lives. In the next section, I will discuss some of these issues in relation to young people.

Section 2: Online Harms that Young People Can Encounter in Digital Spaces

Whenever children and youths interact with others online, there is always a potential risk of harm, either from peers or from adults. Parents, educators and legislators are aware of these risks, and have called for legislation which protects users from online harms such as cyberbullying, hate crimes and harassment, child sexual abuse and terrorist content. In the UK, the Online Harms White Paper (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport & Home Office, 2020), which set out the government's intention to impose a statutory duty of care on online services to protect users, was published in April 2019 and a draft Online Harms Bill was published in May 2021 (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021). Similarly, the EU Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act (European Commission, 2022) seek to place greater responsibility on online platforms and make them liable for illegal and harmful content. Although none of these legal frameworks have yet been implemented, it is clear that online platforms are facing increasing pressure for regulating the content that they host.

The latest EU Kids Online survey (Smahel et al., 2020) studied European children's (ages 9 to 16) online opportunities, risks and safety. The data were collected from 19 European countries (including Malta) between Autumn 2017 and Summer 2019. The large scale of this survey and the common methodology used to survey children's internet use in different countries makes it an invaluable tool for comparison between EU countries. In Malta, the sampling was carried out in Maltese schools by the EU Kids Online team and Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) teachers. The survey asked 9- to 16-year-olds about general harm encountered online by asking all participants: "In the past year, has anything ever happened online that bothered or upset you in some way (e.g., made you feel upset, uncomfortable, scared or that you shouldn't have seen it)?" The proportion of children who replied in the affirmative stood at an average of 25%, but Maltese children were the ones

who were the most likely to report feeling upset, uncomfortable, or annoyed by some online experience (45%) (Smahel et al., 2020). The proportion of Maltese children reporting such negative online experiences increased with age, from 38% of children aged 9 to 10 to 52% of children aged 13 to 14 and 50% of children aged 15 to 16 (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020).

It must be noted that this survey relied on different sampling methods in different countries, which might have influenced the result. In some countries, the data were gathered from household settings, where a parent or a carer would probably have been present during the interview. It is not unreasonable to assume that in such settings, the participants could have downplayed the risks, thus affecting the results. On the other hand, the data collection in Malta was conducted in a classroom context in a whole group setting, not with individual participants. This might partly explain the high percentage of self-reported negative experiences, although it must be noted that this specific sampling method was not limited to the Maltese participants.

Another factor that could have affected the findings is that the question which was asked was rather general in nature and did not aim to differentiate between the different risks or harms that the children might have encountered. This could have contributed to the large percentage of children who reported negative experiences online. In fact, this question was followed by more specific questions, some of which will be discussed in the following sections. One must also keep in mind that the data were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, when children and youths had less access to digital devices. Thus, it could very well be that if the data had been collected in 2020/2021, the results would have been completely different, since it is not unreasonable to expect that when children spend more unsupervised time on digital devices there is more potential for them to engage in activities which could result in harm.

When it comes to online harms, the child or youth can either be a receiver of harmful content, a participant, or even an actor or perpetrator. For example, a child can inadvertently stumble across harmful content, such as pornography, racist or hateful content, or even violent or gory content. A child or youth can also be a participant in an activity which is initiated by adults, such as sexual grooming, or ideological persuasion and radicalisation. Finally, children and youths can be perpetrators of crimes such as cyberbullying, sexual harassment, hacking or copyright infringement (Livingstone et al., 2011). Thus, in the next few sections, I will be discussing some of these online harms in relation to youths. For the sake of brevity, I will not be discussing all potential online harms that youths can encounter online, but I will be tackling a few of them, and I will especially focus on online harms in which youths often act as participants or perpetrators. Having said this, the line between receiver, participant or perpetrator is often far from clear, so in some cases I will be discussing issues which can cut across all three.

Cyberbullying

Children and youths' ability to use digital environments to bully and harass each other is high on the list of concerns of parents and educators. The term 'cyberbullying' was coined in 2008 by Bill Belsey, a Canadian educator who was first concerned with the problem of traditional bullying, but soon realised that new forms of communication have given rise to a new form of bullying. According to Belsey, this new phenomenon involved "the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others" (Belsey, 2019).

In one of the first books dealing with the issue of cyberbullying, Nancy Willard, an American lawyer, initially defined cyberbullying as language that is "defamatory, constitutes bullying, harassment, or discrimination, discloses personal information, or contains offensive,

vulgar or derogatory comments" (Willard, 2003, p.66). She later listed a number of behaviours which constitute cyberbullying; namely flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion, and cyberstalking (Willard, 2006).

The definitions above suggest that cyberbullying is similar to conventional bullying. In both cases, the bullies are fully aware that they are causing harm to the victim, and repeatedly engage in bullying behaviour. Also, both traditional bullying and cyberbullying make the victim feel helpless, while giving the bully a feeling of power (Butler et al., 2009). However, unlike traditional bullying, which is usually confined to face-to-face encounters in particular locations and at particular times, such as break-time in schools, cyberbullying can have more negative consequences for the victim because there is no respite from the bullying, since it can take place at anytime and anywhere (Shariff, 2009; Willard, 2006). It can invade young people's homes through their laptops, tablets and phones. Their homes cannot be considered to be a refuge, and the bullying can continue long after the school day is over. Traditional bullying and cyberbullying are usually not exclusive; in fact, they frequently overlap (Wang et al., 2019).

To make matters worse, cyberbullying can potentially have a global audience, which can increase the potential harm to the victim (Shariff, 2009). It can also be argued that it is easier to bully someone online. In a study with young people, Bryce and Fraser (2013) found that cyberbullying is relatively commonplace in young people's lives, and they have come to expect it in their online interactions. The authors suggest that the prevalence of cyberbullying indicates that social media use, combined with the online disinhibition effect, might interfere with young people's moral values of empathy and honesty. They state that disinhibition increases the bully's confidence and increases the intensity of negative comments and behaviour. Furthermore, the victims are often unable to establish the intentions of the offender, due to the lack of visual social cues and ambiguous situations

(Bryce & Fraser, 2013), which can result in online harassment such as cyberbullying, flaming, trolling and hate speech. Although one can claim that a victim can avoid the bullying by avoiding connecting to the internet, this is often difficult, as young people are becoming totally wired in their everyday lives (Goodstein, 2007; Stoilova et al., 2020).

Since Belsey coined the term 'cyberbullying' in 2004, several studies have explored the prevalence and effect of cyberbullying on children and young people. In a scoping review of social media studies, Hamm et al. (2015) found that the median prevalence of reported cyberbullying in the US was 23%, and that cyberbullying is often associated with an increased likelihood of depression, low self-esteem, behavioural problems and substance abuse in children and adolescents. Most of the research from which these findings emerged were conducted in the US among middle and high school students. Earlier, Van Geel et al. (2014) had reported that cyberbullying was strongly related to suicide ideation (thoughts and wishes to commit suicide). The same trends have been noticed in the UK and the EU. A report compiled by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) states that although bullying is not a new problem, counsellors are seeing changes in how, when and where bullying is taking place. It says that "Young people have talked to us about being bullied on online gaming sites, being subjected to sexual bullying online and being targeted for racist and faith-related bullying following recent high profile terrorist attacks" (NSPCC, 2016, p. 3). According to the report, although physical bullying is still the main bullying concern for children of eleven and younger, online bullying is the top concern for 16-to-18-year-olds. Furthermore, they have seen an 88 per cent increase in counselling about bullying over the previous 5 years.

In Malta, cyberbullying is also a concern. A local teen support website reports that cyberbullying is very common among Maltese teenagers (Borg, 2016). According to Caruana (2014), 60.7% of Year 9 and Year 10 students (13 – 15 years of age) claimed to be victims of

at least one bullying attack on social media platforms, 24.4% of whom were still being bullied. It is interesting to note that 38.3% of the respondents also claimed to be perpetrators of cyberbullying.   Some of the victims claimed to have missed school (16.1%), had thoughts of self-harm (17.3%) and suicidal ideation (13.2%).

The EU Kids Online survey considers online and offline bullying together, since they are often interconnected. The EU average for children who reported to be victims of bullying stands at 23%, while those who reported to be perpetrators was 14%. Maltese children had the second highest incidence of reported bullying in the EU, with 34% saying they were victims and 20% reporting to be perpetrators (Smahel et al., 2020). Not surprisingly, in the case of older children, most of this bullying took place online (90% for 13 to 14-year-olds and 78% for 15 to16-year-olds) (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). As explained above, the fact that the data was collected in schools in a group setting could explain the high numbers of self-reported cases of bullying.

As Lauri and Farrugia have observed, online and offline bullying often merge into each other. Although bullying is not a new phenomenon, it is clear that cyberbullying has added a new dimension to traditional bullying, and that it is a big concern for parents, educators and youths. In fact, one of the aims of my research is to shed some light on educators' views on how and why youths cyberbully each other and how Maltese secondary schools are responding to this phenomenon.

Internet Addictions

Some researchers claim that spending long hours on technological devices is a problem in itself, and may be a symptom of internet addiction, or problematic computer use. The idea that problematic computer use meets the criteria for an addiction was first proposed in 1996 at an annual meeting of the American Psychological Association by Kimberly

Young, an American clinical psychologist. Young then went on to publish the results of a two-year study of internet behaviour and misuse. Data from a number of case studies of internet users led her to identify addictive use of the internet as a distinct psychological disorder that warrants its own entry in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Young, 1998). Media reports picked up on this study and subsequently, the popular and professional debate about this phenomenon intensified. Since this study, research by Young and other researchers has described the ways that internet addiction has had a negative impact on users' lives. Early studies showed a relationship between compulsive use of the internet and social isolation and depression (Kraut et al., 1998), relationship difficulties and marital problems (Cooper et al., 2000; Schneider, 2000; Young et al., 2000), academic failure (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000; Anderson, 2001), reduced productivity at work and being fired from jobs (Young & Case, 2001). In later research, Young researched users who became addicted to chat rooms, interactive games, and even eBay, and explored the consequences created by internet addiction, including online affairs and internet abuse (Young, 2004).

Internet addiction is often defined as overuse of the internet, leading to impairment of an individual's psychological state (both mental and emotional), as well as their scholastic, occupational, and social interactions (Beard & Wolf, 2001). Mental health experts disagree on whether it can be classified as a mental disorder, and in fact, it is still not listed as an official diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). However, in 2018, the World Health Organization announced that it has added Gaming Disorder to its list of mental health conditions (World Health Organization, 2018). Furthermore, the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2014), which is the latest edition of the manual of mental disorders, lists Internet Gaming Disorder as a Condition for Further Study, which means that the American Psychiatric Association has requested

additional research on this before deciding whether to include it as an official disorder in later

editions of the DSM. The DSM-5 notes that this disorder is most common in young males,

especially in Asian countries. Both China and South Korea have identified internet addiction

as a significant public health threat, and consequently support education, research and

treatment of it (Block, 2008).

The decision to include Gaming Disorder in the WHO list of disorders has already

had some impact on legislation and popular discourse. In May of 2018, a bill was introduced

in Minnesota that proposed the prohibition of the sale of video games with loot boxes to

under-18s and requires a severe warning: "This game contains a gambling-like mechanism

that may promote the development of a gaming disorder that increases the risk of harmful

mental or physical health effects, and may expose the user to significant financial risk" (State

of Minnesota, 2018, p. 2). Loot boxes are digital items that players can obtain by paying real

money or in-game currency in order to be able to advance in a game. The particular

mechanism which makes them problematic is that what is found inside is completely random,

which makes them particularly addictive and can even violate gambling laws in some

countries. In fact, regulators in the US and the EU are investigating the phenomenon, and

some countries, such as Belgium and The Netherlands, have banned loot boxes in some

games because of the concern that they encourage children to gamble (Busby, 2018). Loot

boxes are not yet a well-researched phenomenon, but research that investigates the link

between loot boxes and gambling shows that there might be cause for concern. For example,

a series of studies have shown clear relationships between gambling addictions and the way

that people interact with loot boxes. However, although the data show a clear link between

gambling and loot boxes, the data cannot prove causality (Zendle & Cairns, 2018). Thus, it

could be possible that playing games which incorporate loot boxes into their game play

encourages players to play more, or it could be equally possible that people who have a tendency to gambling are more attracted to games which feature loot boxes.

The link between gaming and addictions is not limited to the issue of loot boxes. Zagal et al. (2013) have identified what they call "dark patterns" in game design, which are features that encourage players to spend time playing games, log in frequently, and spend money on games. Such features include repetitive tasks that are designed to keep players logged in and engaged for longer, and features that make them play at a particular time, so that "players are forced to orient their real-world activities to meet the obligations of the game, rather than the other way round" (Zagal et al., 2013, p. 4).

South Korea is one of the most industrialized countries in the world, and it relies heavily on Information Technology. The flipside of this is the emergence of internet addiction as a national issue. South Korea was the first country in the world to allocate a national budget to combat internet addiction among its citizens, even going as far as enacting a law prohibiting children under the age of 16 from playing between midnight and 6 am (Koh, 2015). China has also enacted a similar ban on children under 18 playing online games, with new laws which ban gaming at night and restrict the time that minors can spend on online games and the amount of money that they can transfer to their online gaming accounts (Cheung, 2019). However, enforcing such a ban proved to be difficult to enforce, even in China. After introducing this 'curfew' in 2019, Chinese authorities found that gamers were using their parents' official identities instead of their own. Subsequently, in July 2021, Tencent, a Chinese gaming giant, rolled out facial-recognition software for anyone playing for a certain length of time in order to prevent minors for circumventing the ban (BBC News, 2021).

Such a move would be inconceivable in Europe, where individual privacy and autonomy are given considerable more weight. Nonetheless, some European countries do try

to restrict the use of smartphones in some way. For example, from September 2018, France banned smartphones completely in schools, not just in classrooms, but also during breaks and in between lessons (Ledsom, 2019). Although this move might seem extreme, it has always been the case in Malta. While it is up to each individual school to decide whether to allow the use of phones on school premises, it has always been the policy to enforce a near-total ban. Although Malta is as connected as the rest of Europe, school authorities have always been wary of the effects of smart phones on the attention of students and fear the negative consequences of allowing students to use their phones on school premises. In spite of this ban in school contexts, there are still worrying trends in Malta – for example, a recent study found that 5.2% of 13 to 16-year-olds are considered to be "problematic" internet users, while 15.4% are "at risk users" (The National Centre for Freedom from Addictions, 2017, p. 3).

It is not yet clear whether such bans are entirely warranted, or whether Gaming Disorder, or internet addictions, can be classified as disorders in their own right. It could be the case that playing video games and using social media are merely coping mechanisms that people who already have pre-existing conditions like anxiety and depression use to cope with their stressful lives. The easy access to such technologies might make them more attractive than more traditional coping mechanisms, such as shopping, exercising or eating chocolate. In fact, one might even argue that, in low doses, technology could help some youths who are at risk by giving them an outlet to vent their feelings by playing video games or communicating over social media. The problem is that most research into gaming and new media is in its infancy. The authors of an open letter on the World Health Organization's proposal to include gaming addiction as a mental health disorder say that they are not convinced that there is enough evidence to support this decision, and that doing so can damage the reputation of psychology research (Aarseth et al., 2017). Etchells (2019) argues that classifying gaming addiction as a mental health disorder is problematic because we do

not yet have a very clear idea of what gaming addiction disorder looks like, and thus it is difficult to assess how prevalent it is. However, he argues that what could potentially make gaming more addictive in the future is the inclusion of loot boxes, not because of the games themselves, but "because, where developers are willing to accept that they will harm a portion of their player base, they are happy to employ well-established techniques from the gambling industry that are very successful at generating money" (Etchells, 2019, p. 189). He goes on to say that although media reports often make out games to be as addictive as hard drugs, the scientific research on gaming shows that the reality is much more complicated than the media makes it out to be.

When it comes to Maltese youths' problematic use of the internet, there are two studies with rather conflicting findings. The National Centre for Freedom from Addictions (2017) conducted a study between November 2016 and January 2017 on a sample of 869 13 to 15-year-olds. The findings of this study showed that only 5.2% of Maltese 13 to 16-year-olds can be classified as problematic users. Since this study used a standardised tool called PIEUSA, which was also used in similar studies in the UK and Spain, the authors concluded that Maltese youths are not more at risk than their peers in the UK and Spain. However, the WHO study (Inchley et al., 2020), which took place between September 2017 and July 2018 and was administered in many countries around the world, places Maltese teenagers at the top for problematic internet use. When asked a series of questions about whether internet use has seriously impacted on various aspects of their lives, the number of Maltese adolescents who reported that it had significant impact on their lives was the highest in all the participant countries (20% of 13-year-old girls and 13% of 13-year-old boys and 18% of 15-year-old girls and 17% of 15-year-old boys). The different findings across these two studies could be due to the sample size, the different timeframe, or biases due to self-reporting. The WHO study might be considered to be more reliable because, as explained earlier, it is a

longitudinal study conducted in 50 countries in Europe and North America, and the methodological tools have been widely tested and retested, and also because these figures tie in with other studies regarding Maltese children's digital medial use, which is currently among the highest in the EU.   Research shows that over 98 per cent of Maltese children have access to the internet (Lauri et al., 2015) and that Maltese children (9 to 16-year-olds) spend over three hours a day online, which amounts to the second highest amount of time spent online in other EU countries (Smahel et al., 2020). This seems to indicate that concerns about a lack of balance between time spent online and time spent doing other activities are not entirely unwarranted. In fact, there are other indications that are rather worrying. Maltese adolescents come first in the WHO overweight and obesity charts (Inchley et al., 2020). Research shows that that Maltese children are not very physically active when compared with their peers in other countries (Inchley at al., 2020; Fenech et al., 2020). In fact, Malta is currently facing an obesity pandemic, with 42% of secondary school children being overweight or obese (Fenech et al., 2020).   In the WHO study, only 9% of 15-year-old girls and 16% of 15-year-old boys reported at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.

Similarly, it seems that Maltese secondary school children are not keen readers. In spite of efforts by the National Literacy Agency, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 reading scores show that Maltese adolescents still lag behind their counterparts significantly in reading, ranking lower than average and as one of the lowest in the EU. However, they rank the second highest for technology use during their free time (OECD, 2019). A survey which was carried out in 2017 showed that Maltese adults do not read much. In fact, 56% of respondents said that they had not ready any books in the preceding year, while a further 9% said that they only read one book (National Statistics

Office, 2017). Of course, they could be reading books or other literature online, but the reading scores of Maltese adolescents are still lower than expected.

These figures imply that although it is not clear whether Maltese youths are particularly at risk of being problematic users, it is very likely that the use of digital technologies could be displacing other essential activities, and maybe it is the displacement of these activities that could be contributing to lower levels of wellbeing.

Sexting, Online Pornography and Revenge Porn

One of the issues that often concerns educators, parents, policy makers and organisations working with youths is sexting (McGovern et al., 2016). Sexting refers to the sharing of "sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images of themselves to someone else via text messaging" (Lenhart, 2009), p. 2). Although sexting among youths has become a relatively common occurrence (Ringrose et al., 2012), such images can easily be used to bully or coerce children and youths if they happen to fall in the wrong hands.

The EU Kids Online survey measured the prevalence of sexting and pornography among European youths. It investigated sexting as a dialogical practice, that is, when young people send, receive and request sexts from peers. The findings show that 28% of Maltese children had received sexual messages in the past year, while 12% reported sending one (Smahel et al., 2020). The Maltese principal investigators, Lauri and Farrugia, broke these figures down in a national report. Unsurprisingly, secondary school children were more likely to receive sexual messages (26% of 13 to 14-year-olds and 45% of 15 to 16-year-olds reported receiving sexual messages) (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020).   A subsequent report which focused on the data about sexting revealed that Maltese youths were the second most likely to send and request sexual information online, surpassed only by German youths. Furthermore, 6% of Maltese youths posted sexual information publicly online (Barbovschi et al., 2021).

The authors of this report found a link between active sexting and lower feelings of safety at home. They suggest that one possible interpretation of this finding is that young people who have less support at home resort to digital spaces to compensate for this need. They recommend that in light of the prevalence of sexting among young people, policy makers should frame the discussions on sexting in terms of online reputation management, rather than in terms of risky behaviour. They also advocated for relevant sexual education in schools and more focus on digital skills, since it transpired that the youths who post sexual information publicly are more likely to have lower levels of digital skills (ibid.).

Researchers who view sexting as a sexually liberating practice suggest that it is a form of self-expression (Hasinoff, 2013; 2015) and a virtual form of sexual experimentation (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). The popular body positivity movement on social media encourages the display of nudity as 'empowerment', encouraging people (women in particular), to 'love their body' and be proud of it, despite its imperfections. Indeed, social media has encouraged self-expression and exposure. In 2014, Kim Kardashian, a famous celebrity, famously "broke the internet" when she posed nude for *Paper* magazine (Alter, 2014). Like other famous celebrities, Kardashian's aim was probably to use social media to gain notoriety. Although the internet did not 'break', the post did go viral and gain a lot of media attention.

However, other researchers view sexting in a more negative light. They argue that when taking sexual or nude pictures of themselves, sexters objectify their own body by judging it through the pictures (Ringrose et al., 2012; Jewell & Brown, 2013). These researchers claim that far from being proud of their body's imperfections, people who engage in sexting aim to conform to the ideal body images perpetuated by the media, and in the process objectify their own bodies (Ringrose et al., 2012).

Apart from data resulting from the EU Kids Online survey, there is very little research on sexting among Maltese youths, and it seems that the issue is not considered to be a priority

in Maltese secondary schools. Deguara's (2015) research, which was based on qualitative interviews with school authorities and members of the law-enforcement and other agencies, found that although participants thought that sexting was prevalent among Maltese youths, there were no sexting policies in schools. Deguara also found that youths who shared nude photos of themselves often felt guilty, ashamed, vulnerable and humiliated. The findings of this research accentuate the tension between the lifestyles that modern Maltese youths are living, in contrast with their religious upbringing[3]. Deguara's study followed a high-profile case in which a number of nude selfies of Maltese women were posted on Tumblr, a social media platform (Cooke, 2014). The case sparked an outcry and paved the way for a subsequent change in the law. In November of 2016, Malta became the third country in Europe to criminalise revenge porn (Galea, 2016), a term which refers to the sharing of sexually explicit photos without the consent of the subject, often as an act of revenge.

Deguara notes a lack of awareness among the participants, most of whom seemed to have a lack of understanding of sexting and its consequences for youths. The participants who worked in schools showed a lack of understanding of how to tackle sexting and questioned whether the school should get involved if the sexting happens outside the school grounds. They were also unable to mention outside agencies to whom such cases should be referred to (Deguara, 2015). Unfortunately, Deguara's research was not conducted with sexting victims or perpetrators, or any child under the age of eighteen. Although such research would have been very useful, it has been proven very difficult to obtain clearance from gatekeepers for such research, due to ethical issues related to using children as participants. In spite of its prevalence among youths, sexting is still quite a taboo in Malta, which is probably another reason why the subject has not been well-researched.

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[3] I will be elaborating on this in a subsequent chapter, which will discuss the role of moral education in Malta.

An exploratory qualitative report commissioned by the NSPCC in 2012 (Ringrose et al., 2012) also reveals that although sexting has become a normal phenomenon in teenagers' lives, it can sometimes be coercive, and lead to harassment and bullying. Girls are often more adversely affected, and sexting reflects wider sexual pressures on teenage girls. The findings show that younger children are also affected by sexting, often as young as twelve-to-thirteen-year-olds (ibid.). This can be compounded by other factors, such as access to online pornography (Livingstone & Brake, 2010) and the pressure for girls to perform in a hyper-sexy feminine way (Ringrose & Eriksson Barajas, 2011). Although youths routinely engage with these risks, there seems to be a dearth of research on sexual harassment and other sexualised digital behaviours. In fact, the first UK study which focused on secondary school students' views and educational needs around sexting education has shown a total mismatch between what young people need from their parents and teachers and what they actually receive (Jørgensen et al., 2019). Although the findings of this study are based on a small sample of fourteen participants, the data are rich and nuanced in their discussion of sexting. The findings clearly show that young people lack the opportunities to discuss their sexting practices with adults. The participants explained they sometimes needed support when nude messages (sexts) got leaked, but did not trust their teachers with this information. One of the main recommendations that the authors of this study made are that: "sext education needs to focus as much on wider relationship issues such as consent, trust, gender, body image, bullying and sexual harassment, as they do on the particular apps (which rapidly change) or the dangers of being online" (Jørgensen et al., 2019, p. 36). The study shows that existing UK resources and strategies that schools use to address the subject (such as holding assemblies about the subject) are perceived to be ineffective by young people.

A survey commissioned by the Children's Commissioner of England and the NSPCC on the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of

children and young people points at some worrying trends in relation to sexting (Martellozzo et al., 2017). The researchers found that 13% of 11 to 16-year-olds in the study had taken topless pictures of themselves, while 3% had taken fully naked pictures of themselves. Follow-up questions indicated that 55% of these young people had shared the images, sometimes with strangers, while 20% of them said that they were pressured or coerced to do so. More recent research paints an even more worrying picture. A 2021 Ofsted report highlights the gap between the perspectives of secondary school students and their teachers. Students reported being put under pressure to send sexual images of themselves (80%), being sent unsolicited sexual images (88%) and having their pictures or videos shared without their consent by their peers (73%), with images and videos typically shared on platforms such as WhatsApp or Snapchat. However, in the focus groups, many students talked about teachers being "out of date" and not "knowing the reality" of their lives (Ofsted, 2021).

In their large-scale study of young people aged 14-17 in five EU countries (of which Malta was not a participant), Stanley et al., (2016) specifically looked at the role of coercion in sexting and found that the more boys consume pornography, the more likely they are to put pressure on girls to send them sexually explicit photos of themselves. The researchers found that 19% to 30% of young people across five European countries regularly watch pornography online, and negative gender attitudes among boys overlap with regular use of online pornography. This research supports Livingstone et al.'s (2011) conclusion that watching pornography online poses a common but serious risk for youths. Of course, one cannot assume that pornography consumption necessarily leads to negative gender attitudes; it could very well be the case that boys who already have negative gender attitudes are more likely to consume pornography. However, it is something that should be taken into consideration when it comes to education and policy making.

Unfortunately, there is not much research on online pornography consumption among

Maltese teenagers. Pornography was outlawed in Malta until 2016. However, enforcement was scant, and as far back as 2009, internet statistics showed that internet porn usage was amongst the highest of all the EU member states, with the online pornography site Pornhub.com ranking higher than the leading bank website and the University of Malta website (Darmanin, 2009). The only set of data which is available on the consumption of pornography by youths comes from the EU Kids Online survey. When asked if they had seen any explicit images of a sexual nature over the past year (either on their phone, in a magazine, on television, on a DVD or on the internet), 45% of 13 to 14-year-old and 70% of 15 to 16-year-old Maltese youths replied in the affirmative. The gender differences between males and females were not significant (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). The EU average was 39% of 13 to 14-year-olds and 61% of 15 to 16-year-olds (Smahel et al., 2020). Although this study does give us some indication of pornography use among Maltese youths, it must be noted that the research was part of a much larger study and is not very nuanced. For example, the numbers might be inflated due to the broad definition of pornography. The study conflates images on a magazine or a book with images on a social networking platform, on a pornographic site, unsolicited images received through direct messages, images on browser pop-ups, and so on. It also makes no distinction between images of naked people and more hardcore pornography. In fact, research findings suggest that children are more likely to report unintentional rather than intentional viewing of pornography (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Watters, 2013).

There is also some research into Maltese University students' views on pornography, which might shed some light on how older youths conceive of pornography (Bonello, 2014; Falzon, 2016). Both Bonello and Falzon found that males viewed pornography more often than females, while Falzon found that the majority of respondents, both male and female, believed that pornography should not be censored. A leading Maltese sexologist, Dr.

Nicholas Briffa, argues that the Maltese watch porn mainly in order to educate themselves on sexual matters. He proposed the introduction of 'porn literacy' in Maltese schools, that is, lessons on pornography and its effects on individuals (Agius, 2018). This concept of porn literacy is not new; in fact, Boston University School of Public Health professor Emily Rothman has piloted a study and subsequently developed a high school course designed to help youths critically assess pornography (Rothman et al., 2018).

These findings show that although young people regularly engage in sexting and consumption of pornography, evidence-based educational responses are severely lacking. Although this study does not focus on sexting and pornography, it does shed some light on how educators tackle such issues in schools and how policy makers and experts address them via existing and planned policies and curricula. These issues are particularly problematic to discuss in Malta, a context in which Roman Catholic values have traditionally been very pervasive, since such subjects are often considered to be taboo and can cause embarrassment for some people. They are also complicated by unclear boundaries between practices that are legal and those which are illegal, and uncertainty over what kind of content is harmful. For example, under Maltese law, any pornographic material which depicts children under the age of 18 is considered to be child pornography, even if it is generated by the children or youths themselves and sent consensually to intimate partners. This means that many young people sometimes unwittingly break the law in a very serious manner, because although they think of themselves as mature individuals who send and receive nude photos in the normal course of their relationships, in the eyes of the law, they are still considered minors. Thus, both the senders and receivers of nude pictures or videos which depict minors would be committing a very serious crime, even if they happen to be minors themselves.

Online Hate and Extremism

Both the UK's Online Harms Bill (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport & Home Office, 2021) and the EU's Digital Services Act (European Commission, 2022) recognise that online platforms have a responsibility to limit the spread of harmful and illegal content, especially with regards to children. The Online Harms Bill sets out strict guidelines overseeing the removal of illegal content such as child sexual abuse, terrorist material and media that promotes suicide, bullying and abuse, which platforms must conform with. Any platform which fails to do so would face hefty fines or risk being blocked in the UK. As Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden told parliament: "A 13-year-old should no longer be able to access pornographic images on Twitter, YouTube will not be allowed to recommend videos promoting terrorist ideologies and anti-Semitic hate crimes will need to be removed without delay" (Kelion, 2020).

Unfortunately, online hate and abuse is something that has been allowed to go unchecked on social media and gaming platforms. Although such hate is not always illegal, in some cases it verges into an expression of hate towards minorities, or what is known as 'hate speech'.   The Council of Europe defines hate speech as covering "all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin." (Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, 1997).

According to a survey commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League, 44% of Americans were subjected to online hateful speech and harassment in 2020. Almost half of the respondents who had experienced online harassment believed it was because of their political views (55%), while one-in-four (25%) respondents felt the focus of their online harassment experience was their gender, 21% because of their religion, and 25% because of

their race or ethnicity.   Some of the harassment was rooted in the victim's minority characteristics, with LGBTQ+ individuals, Muslims, Hispanics and African-Americans facing especially high rates of identity-based discrimination.   Younger Americans appear to be more susceptible, 68% of 18 to 21-year-olds (65%) reporting some form of hate or harassment and 44% reporting severe harassment (Anti-Defamation League, 2020).

Ofcom, the UK's media regulator, reports that 45% of 12 to 15-year-olds have seen something "hateful on the internet" directed at "a particular group of people, based on, for instance, their gender, religion, disability, sexuality or gender identity" (Ofcom, 2017, p. 5). The EU Kids Online survey reports similar findings.   Children between 12 and 16 reported seeing online hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals (e.g., people of different colour, religion, nationality or sexuality) on a monthly basis or a few times per year.   The findings show that 17% of EU children have seen such messages at least every month or more often, while 24% have only seen such messages a few times per year.   The statistics for Maltese children are similar, since 18% have reported seeing such messages every month or more often, and 22% have seen them a few times per year (Smahel et al., 2020).   According to a recent Eurobarometer survey held in 28 EU member states (European Commission, 2018b), the Maltese were the ones most likely to use social networks daily and also the ones most likely to encounter hate speech online, (55% of Maltese respondents, almost double the EU average of 29%).   More worryingly, they were twice as likely to encounter terrorist content online, with 12% of Maltese respondents reporting that they came across some kind of terrorist-related material, compared to the EU average of 6%.   Although this Eurobarometer survey was not aimed at youths, youths are just as likely as adults (if not more likely) to be exposed to unprecedented levels of hate directed towards minorities.

This kind of hate can take the form of online harassment, or 'trolling', which is often aimed at women and at racial and religious minorities.   Before they were shut down, online

fora such as 4chan and 8chan were infiltrated by white supremacist groups, with 8chan professing itself to be the "darkest reaches of the internet" (Borgeson & Bacigalupo, 2022, p. 123). Both fora encouraged anonymous contributions and discussions, with 'politically incorrect' or 'pol' boards serving as a repository of hate speech, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, and insults aimed at minority groups. Hine et al. (2017), who analysed the role of so-called 'politically incorrect' boards in online hate speech, found that 12% of /pol/ posts contained hateful terms and the board contained many more links to tabloid and right-wing leaning news outlets than mainstream sites. They also found that 4chan had a significant effect on attacks on other websites such as YouTube, with 4chan users attacking YouTube posters who advocated for tolerance, gender equality and feminism. 4Chan has also been associated with controversies such as Gamergate, which revolved around issues of sexism in video game culture. Gamergate was an online harassment campaign which targeted several women in the gaming industry, and included doxxing, rape threats and death threats towards these women. Gamergate supporters organized on online platforms such as 4chan, Twitter, and Reddit, subjecting individuals who came to the victims' defence to similar harassment (Dewey, 2014).

The digital realm provides users with a safe space to discuss their ideologies with like-minded others and intensify their hate without real-life consequences. The echo chamber that such fora generate can lure users into a space in which extreme ideologies proliferate and, in turn, influence other users. Such online communities can intensify hate towards others until it spills over into the offline world. As Jurgenson (2012a, 2012b) and Terranova (2004) have pointed out, what happens online can have very real consequences in the offline world.

Brandon Tarrant, the gunman who killed fifty people and injured dozens in two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch on 15 March 2019 (BBC News, 2020), was

very active in such fora. Before committing the horrific crime, he uploaded a 73-page

manifesto on Twitter and 8chan to explain his motivations. According to Daniel Victor,

writing for the New York Times, the manifesto and his other social media posts featured

"typical white nationalist rhetoric with layers upon layers of irony and meta jokes, making it

difficult to parse what is genuine and what he just thought was funny." One of his self-

confessed goals was to "agitate the political enemies of my people into action, to cause them

to overextend their own hand and experience the eventual and inevitable backlash as a

result." He said he wanted to "incite violence, retaliation and further divide." (Victor, 2019).

Tarrant posted a Facebook link on 8chan so that his followers could see him in action,

then proceeded to strap on a camera to his head and livestream his attack on two mosques in

Christchurch on Facebook. His followers on 8chan hailed him as a 'hero' after the shooting

(ibid). Facebook has released a statement saying that this footage was seen by 200 viewers

during its live broadcast and viewed 4,000 times before it was removed. However, in the first

24 hours after the attack, users uploaded the video 1.5 million times, and another 1.2 million

tried to upload it but were prevented from doing so.   The statement also says that before

Facebook was alerted to the video, a user on 8chan had posted a link to a copy of the video

on a file-sharing site (Meta, 2019). This makes it practically impossible to know how many

people have viewed it in total.

This horrific crime has put a spotlight on the link between extremism and social

media. Social media allows such hate to spread under the radar of law enforcement because

it is not tied to a particular physical space, so users from all over the world can effectively be

congregating in the same digital space. The relative anonymity afforded by social media also

helps to conceal such crimes. There is also the disinhibition effect which comes into play

(Suler, 2004). If you had to insult or attack someone in the physical world, you would

immediately see the consequences of your action. You can see the hurt on their face, and

there is always the risk that they will retaliate against you or that you would get into trouble. Just like cyberbullying, when hate speech and extremism are performed online, they attract less real-world consequences for the perpetrators, and just like cyberbullying, hate speech and extremism can be witnessed by a much bigger audience, thus being a vector for radicalising others. Social media connect people across the globe, so they facilitate connections between like-minded individuals all around the world. Such media serve not only to facilitate radicalisation, but also accelerate the process, acting as an echo chamber, which tends to confirm already existing beliefs (Von Behr et al., 2013).

While hate speech and extremism proliferate online, the methods used by people who want to incite hate is not new. People have always used media to influence others, be it newspapers, radio or television. The difference between the traditional types of media and the newer social media is that most of the new media are not overseen by any kind of editor or moderator, so whatever is posted or uploaded online will only be taken down after it has been reported by other users. This places greater responsibility on users, since they are now, more than ever before, solely responsible for what they say or do online. Online social media are also more difficult to control because content is generated in real time. For example, the footage of the mosque attacks was being broadcasted on Facebook in real time, and the video was viewed 4000 times before being removed by Facebook (Meta, 2019). This also says something about the scale of social media. Traditional media were typically broadcasted or published locally, and only the big news corporations had the financial power to broadcast across the world. While traditional media were mainly consumed by adults, social media are increasingly being consumed by children and youths, often away from the watchful eyes of adults. Youths who are at risk of marginalisation or are in the process of exploring their identities can fall prey to such indoctrination and may be induced to commit crimes in the name of religion or ideology.

There is a gap in the research on how Maltese youths experience online hate, extremism and radicalisation. This is probably because although Maltese Internet users are exposed to hate speech and terrorist material (European Commission, 2018b; Smahel et al., 2020), there has never been a major terrorist attack in Malta and very little reported hate crime. In fact, there is a total absence of data pertaining to hate speech and hate crime in Malta (Vella Muskat, 2016). This could be due to a number of reasons. Vella Muskat suggests that there is a lack of understanding of hate as a crime, that most hate crimes are not reported to the police (neither by victims nor by bystanders) and that the police are not diligent in recording hate crimes (ibid.). However, this does not mean that Malta is immune to this phenomenon. In 2019, two soldiers were charged with the murder of a black Ivorian man and the attempted murder of two other men in a racially-motivated drive-by shooting (Carabott, 2021).   Activists and non-governmental organisations have blamed this on institutional racism, accusing the police of the racial profiling of immigrants, and politicians of "fanning the flames of racial prejudice" (Malta Independent, 2022). In another racially-motivated hate crime, three police officers were charged with abducting and injuring dark-skinned foreign nationals (Zammit, 2022). Although these two instances of hate crime seem to be isolated incidents, they do suggest institutional racism, since both crimes were committed by members of the disciplinary forces.

One of the purposes of this research is to investigate what educators and policy makers think about online harms and how schools are responding to them. Before carrying out the research, it was envisaged that although most participants would be familiar with online harms such as cyberbullying, internet addiction, revenge porn, sexting, pornography and hate speech, most of them would probably not be familiar with the issues of radicalisation and extremism. This is because the national conversation on radicalisation and extremism remains almost non-existent.

The issue of online harms and their regulation is very complex, because the balance between the use and abuse of digital technologies is often very delicate. Of course, there are other harms such as grooming, child sexual abuse and exploitation, hacking and identity theft, which, due for the sake of brevity, I have not discussed in this chapter.

Aiken (2016), a cyber-psychologist, believes that we are currently conducting the greatest real-life social experiment on young children and youths. She claims that young children often have access to the internet before the age of reason, when children acquire the psychological ability to understand the world around them and distinguish between what is morally right and wrong. She quotes Suler as saying "You wouldn't take your children and leave them alone in the middle of New York City, and that's effectively what you're doing when you allow them to go into cyberspace alone." (Aiken, 2016, p. 121). Although young children and youths often seem to be more media-savvy than the older generation, their age renders them vulnerable to the increasingly complex ethical issues they face when they navigate life in online and offline spaces. Thus, in the next section, I will discuss how schools deal with such issues, and whether education has kept pace with the developments in technology and new media.

Section 3: Moral Education for the Age of Technology

The earlier discussion on the proliferation of digital technologies and the merging of the online with the offline has important implications for education. Although the teaching of ICT-related skills such as coding and knowing how to use computers have long been part of school curricula, it is now evident that schools must impart not just the knowledge and skills that students need to be able to use digital technologies, but also the values and the attitudes that are required for them navigate the digital world.

In a study carried out between 2008 and 2012 by Howard Gardner and his team as part of the Good Play Project, the researchers found that youths often demonstrate a moral blindness when it comes to their online activities. One of the researchers on this project, James, investigates "how we might narrow the ethics gap and cultivate more conscious, and conscientious, ways of being digital" (James, 2014, p. 109). She interviewed young people between the ages of ten and twenty-five in order to find out their views about privacy, property and online participation. James identified three kinds of thinking that youths demonstrate during their online interactions: self-focused thinking (thinking which is mostly focused on personal consequences), moral thinking (focused on consequences for people they know) and finally, ethical thinking (thinking about consequences for the community and the unknown other). James concludes that young people often show blind spots and disconnects in their ethical thinking. Although she considers blind spots to be unconscious and unintended, disconnects are conscious choices made in order to promote one's self-interests. When considering ways to deal with this digital ethics gap, James highlights the key role of education. She laments the fact that although there is evidence of conversations about the internet taking place in schools, most of these tend to focus on the personal risks to youths, rather than on their ethical responsibility towards others. Ethical issues often give way to consequence-oriented messages, such as avoiding posting personal information online in order to protect yourself from harm. Even when moral and ethical issues were on the educational agenda, she found no transfer of ethical thinking skills from offline to online contexts.

Although James' distinctions between the different kinds of thinking comes across as rather simplistic, her conclusions have important implications for moral education. The blurring between the online and the offline worlds necessitate a type of moral education which teaches students how to behave ethically and morally in all aspects of their lives.

Traditionally, the field of moral education has dealt with issues of respect for persons and the ethics of care, among other topics (Gilligan, 1982, Noddings, 1984). However, the challenge today is to "overcome the ways in which the virtual world is typically intangible, invisible, and easily delayed or ignored" (Whittier, 2013, p. 21). Phenomena such as cyberbullying are enabled by the internet because the distance between the victim and the perpetrator in an online environment can promote disengagement from immoral acts. As discussed earlier, the absence of visual cues such as the pain felt by the victim, as well as the anonymity of the internet, can reduce empathy and result in harsher treatment of others.

Vallor (2016) insists that in order to cope with emerging technologies such as robotics, Artificial Intelligence, genome editing, 3D printing, new social media and communications, digital surveillance and biomedical enhancement technologies, humanity must develop "technomoral virtues" (Vallor, 2016, p. 3), or virtues for the technological age. According to Vallor, a contemporary theory of ethics "must include an explicit conception of how to live well with technologies, especially those which are still emerging and have yet to become settled" (ibid.). In *Technology and the Virtues*, Vallor (2016) makes a very compelling case for applying a virtue ethics framework to the field of ethics of technology. Virtue ethicists believe that a moral person is one who is disposed to do the right thing in his or her everyday life. Through the cultivation of good moral habits, one develops the right kind of moral character, which is made up of a number of virtues, such as patience, courage, honesty. In her earlier work, Vallor (2010) discussed how social media impact the development of character virtues such as patience, honesty and empathy, and concludes by saying that although social media have the potential to promote such virtues, they often do the opposite. She believes that what is required is "a more widespread and systematic application of virtue based normative framework to question the ethical impact of

information technology and social networking technologies in particular" (Vallor, 2010, p. 157).

Until recently, the dominant ethical theories pertaining to the ethics of technology were utilitarian and deontological in nature. Utilitarianism is an ethical theory, according to which, at its simplest, the right decision is the decision which creates the greatest amount of benefit for the greatest number of individuals. It is often contrasted with a deontological ethics, according to which the fundamental ethical notion is that of duty, and which stipulates that some duties are required of us no matter what the consequences of adhering to them. Virtue ethics, an ethical theory which is based on the Aristotelian notions of character and virtue, was not considered to be a contender to these two theories. However, it has recently enjoyed a resurgence, not only in the field of philosophy, but also in other disciplines such as education, psychology, theology and the social sciences.   Writers such as Anscombe (1958) and MacIntyre (1981) brought virtue ethics to the attention of the public, and subsequently, many moral philosophers, such as Curren (2000), Carr (2008) Kristjánsson (2020) and Harrison (2010; 2016) have written about the role of character and virtue in solving contemporary ethical problems.

Using cyberbullying as an example, Harrison argues that virtue ethics is better suited to solving moral problems than deontologist or consequentialist theories. He contends that doing the right thing in an online environment should not just be a question of following the rules or an assessment of the consequences of your actions, but it should be a matter of the practicing virtues such as empathy, which result in the formation of habits (Harrison, 2016). This is particularly important in an online environment, where there is a near-absence of rules and laws, due to the global reach of the internet. Similarly, Couldry (2010) prefers a virtue ethics perspective over deontological and utilitarian ones in the study of the internet because rules are often hard to establish and uphold in digital spaces, and it is even harder to predict

the consequences of what happens on the internet.

All these theories can contribute to an education in how to use technology in an ethical manner. Such an education must necessarily incorporate reflection and discussion about one's values and sense of responsibility and duty of care towards others. This kind of education goes by different names, such as 'digital citizenship education', 'digital ethics' and 'cyberethics'. It is also a component of broader terms such as 'digital media literacy' and 'media and information literacy', among others. However, what all of the above have in common is a concern with living the good life and with a sense of moral duty and responsibility towards others, both online and offline. They are based on a branch of philosophical ethics called cyberethics, which is the study of ethical issues related to technology and the internet and their effects on humans and society, and is closely related to two other fields in applied ethics – Computer Ethics and Information Ethics (Ramadhan, et al., 2011).

Computer Ethics

Computer Ethics started off in the early 1940's, when MIT professor Norbert Wiener was helping to develop antiaircraft cannon which had the ability to destroy fast warplanes. He quickly realised the implications of such technology and published a book called *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Wiener, 1950). Although he did not use the term Computer Ethics, he laid down the foundations for the field, and his work is still very relevant today (Bynum, 2004).

The field of Computer Ethics is based on the premise that rapid developments in new technologies often outpace law and ethics, that is, a gap develops between emerging technologies and legal-ethical oversight (French, 2011). This happens because technology evolves at a fast pace, while laws and regulations are passed at a much slower rate; so they

often only address a snapshot of technology. Since the legal structure is supposed to be the regulator of science and technology and is often the means by which we attempt to resolve conflicts, it should be based on the relevant facts, rather on technologies which are often already outdated by the time they become regulated. Similarly, ethical values, which often provide the foundations for both legal and broader societal responses to emerging technologies, must keep up with the changes in society (Askland, 2011).

Moor's seminal 1985 paper elucidated the ethical challenges that new technologies bring about. "Computers provide us with new capabilities and these in turn give us new choices for action. Often, either no policies for conduct in these situations exist or existing policies seem inadequate" (Moor, 1985, p. 266). In this paper, Moor wrote about a "policy vacuum", adding that the collective lack of understanding of new technologies constituted a "conceptual vacuum". Such policy vacuums occur when emerging technologies outpace legal and ethical development (ibid.). One well known example of this is the Metallica vs Napster lawsuit. In 2000. Metallica, a popular American rock band, filed a lawsuit against Napster for copyright infringement and racketeering (Marshall, 2016). At the time, Napster was a peer-to-peer file sharing software which allowed users to share their digital music files. The copyright rules of the time did not address such copyright infringement adequately, causing a policy vacuum for digital music file sharing. This was compounded by a conceptual vacuum, since there was disagreement on the ethical use of this new technology. According to Marshall, this lawsuit "unleashed a debate about art and ethics rarely expressed outside the confines of academia" (Marshall, 2016, p. 7).

Although avoiding such policy and conceptual vacuums seems like an impossible feat, Moor argues that we need to attempt to understand new technologies in order to anticipate their potential misuse, and then devise policies which would minimise the negative impact on society. He warns that "we are living in a period of technology that promises

dramatic changes and in which it is not satisfactory to do ethics as usual" (Moor, 2005, p. 111). Moor gives a few examples of how such technologies can challenge existing laws, such as identity theft and the grooming of children by molesters on the internet. Thus, he presented a hypothesis which he called Moor's Law that states that: As technological revolutions increase their social impact, ethical problems increase (Moor, 2005, p. 117).

Nowadays, the field of Computer Ethics deals with issues of computer use, such as copyright infringement, invasion of privacy and the distribution of objectionable material (Ki & Ahn, 2006). Cyberethics was developed as an extension of the field to reflect the new reality of the internet and to tackle the lack of moral regulation, authority and rules of conduct in cyberspace (Shin, 2008). Mahfood et al. describe the field as "social responsibility in cyberspace" (Mahfood et al, 2005). Pruitt-Mentle (2008) conceives of cyberethics as a discipline which deals with right and wrong, and with moral duty and obligation in online environments and on digital media.

Although the fields of Computer Ethics and Cyberethics have rapidly gained ground as academic fields, this does not seem to be reflected in the field of moral education literature. In a study about the extent to which teachers felt prepared to teach about cyberethics and ethical behaviour online, Yamano (2004) found that teachers often expressed difficulty in doing so, reported that they did not feel comfortable teaching specific concepts about cyberethics, and that they did not have the time or the training to do it effectively. Furthermore, the few teachers who did tackle the subject in class did so through direct instruction, rather than through discussion and activities. The teachers who participated in the study were mostly concerned about issues of privacy, personal identity, plagiarism, hacking and hate speech (ibid.).

Whittier (2013) has built on Yamano's research as well as Ryan and Bohlin's (1999) work on moral education in order to develop a curriculum for teachers which focuses on

seven areas: (i) cyberspace psychology, (ii) privacy, (iii) identity, (iv) internet safety and responsible computing (including harassment and cyberbullying, (v) speech, (vi) hacking, netiquette and cybercitizenship, and (vii) leadership, teaching cyberethics, and developing policies for technology use in schools. This curriculum focuses on the core virtues of respect, responsibility, empathy, honesty and trust in order to prepare teachers to deal with issues of cyberethics in the classroom through cooperative discussion with their students. Thus, Whittier envisages this curriculum as a branch of character education, or moral/ethics education.

Although cyberethics is now an accepted branch of philosophical ethics, the term 'cyber' is rather outdated. It was first used in the 1950 by Wiener (1950) when he coined the term 'cybernetics' to describe self-regulating computing systems. William Gibson created the term 'cyberspace' in his short story *Burning Chrome* in 1982, to refer to widespread, interconnected digital technology, and later popularised it when he used it again in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*. It is now widely used to refer to anything associated with the internet; however, in recent years, the popularity of the term has declined, often replaced by the word 'digital', which is broader in nature. Thus, in the next section, I will use the term 'digital citizenship education' to refer to a newer form of moral education for the digital age.

Digital Citizenship Education and Ethics

In the last fifteen years, education which is focused on ethical online behaviour, internet safety and cyberbullying have become synonymous with the term 'digital citizenship' (Ribble et al., 2004; Council of Europe, 2019; International Society for Technology in Education, 2021; James et al., 2021). Ribble, who founded the Digital Citizenship Institute, was one of the pioneers of the field of digital citizenship education, and his work is still highly relevant. In 2004, in a journal article which he wrote with Bailey and

Ross, he put forward one of the first conceptualisations of digital citizenship, defined as "the norms of behaviour with regard to technology use" (Ribble, et al., 2004, p. 7). They identified nine key areas of behaviour that constitute digital citizenship:

Etiquette: electronic standards of conduct or procedure

Communication: electronic exchange of information

Education: the process of teaching and learning about technology and the use of technology

Access: full electronic participation in society

Commerce: electronic buying and selling of goods

Responsibility: electronic responsibility for actions and deeds

Rights: those freedoms extended to everyone in a digital world

Safety: physical well-being in a digital technology world

Security (self-protection): electronic precautions to guarantee safety.

(Ribble et al., 2004, p. 7)

Ribble and Bailey continued to explore the concept of digital citizenship more extensively. In 2005, they wrote an article titled *Developing Ethical Direction*, in which they used the metaphor of the moral compass to describe how school-aged children make ethical decisions in a digital context (Ribble & Bailey, 2005). This article, as well as a subsequent book by Ribble and Bailey called *Digital Citizenship in Schools* (Ribble & Bailey, 2007), were both published by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), which is one of the leading organisations in technology education in the US. This definition of digital citizenship has been adopted by many schools (Kane et al., 2016) and endorsed by many influential advocacy organisations in the field of education, including the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), UNESCO, Common Sense Education, Media

Literacy Now, the Obama Foundation, the UN Alliance of Civilisation (UNAOC) and the UK-based IMPERO Software.

The term and its definition draw from the concept of citizenship. Computer users are citizens of the digital society, which is global in nature, and thus, they have a responsibility towards their follow citizens to behave appropriately when using digital communication technologies (Hollandsworth et al., 2011; Ribble, 2011). Although digital citizenship is not limited to education, many educational institutions have incorporated some of the elements of digital citizenship in their curriculum. In the US, ISTE adopted the term 'digital citizenship' in 2007 (International Society for Technology in Education, 2021) in its rewrite of the 1998 ISTE National Educational Technology Standards, which aim to guide responsible and ethical use of information and technology for students, teachers and administrators. These standards have been adopted by all the 50 US states (International Society for Technology in Education, 2022), effectively mainstreaming the term 'digital citizenship' in education.

However, Ribble's concept of digital citizenship has been criticised by Noula as one that "latches on moral panics associated with the short history of the internet", such as pornography, cyberbullying, privacy, radicalisation and fake news (Noula, 2019, p. 9). Noula argues that their approach is simplistic and overly "user-friendly". Noula also accuses this approach of being decontextualised, and of subscribing to the online/offline disconnect, without acknowledging the seamlessness between the online and the offline contexts. She also argues that the framework has a normative and prescriptive approach to moral education, having a detrimental effect on discussion (ibid.).

Ribble's user-friendly approach, which Noula considers to be a major shortcoming, is probably what has made his work so accessible to educators and to

school leaders, and what has helped mainstream the term 'digital citizenship'. It must be acknowledged that Ribble was on the forefront of the drive for schools to tackle ethical issues that students face in online spaces, at a time when the academic literature on the topic was limited. Rather than being perceived as responding to moral panics, Ribble's work was adopted by many school leaders who were facing new situations and did not know how to deal with them within their curricula. Noula's criticism of Ribble's work as subscribing to the online/offline disconnect can also probably be attributed to the fact that when Ribble's work was published, young people's online and offline lives were more clearly demarcated. In fact, most of Ribble's curriculum feels rather dated now. On the other hand, Noula's charge of Ribble's approach as having a normative and prescriptive approach to moral education is more justified. Ribble's curriculum is very structured, with specific lesson plans, tips for teachers, answer sheets and scoring rubrics. As Noula suggests, the normative and prescriptive approach does not offer a lot of space for discussion, sometimes portraying the situations as 'right' or 'wrong', without allowing for a more nuanced approach.

Kristen Mattson (2016) has also made similar claims about Ribble's curriculum. She contends that Ribble's approach is based on traditional teaching methods, which put the teacher in control of the driving seat and portray the student as a passive learner. She points out that Ribble's Digital Driver's License exams consist of a multiple-choice assessment, which encourages learning by rote and is highly prescriptive. The wording of these loaded questions automatically removes some power from the students to freely form an opinion or share their experiences without having to actively rebel against the ideas of right and wrong as set forth in the curriculum. So, while Ribble (2015) claims that these activities are meant to help students explore their ideas of appropriate technology use, he is actually setting forth his own ideas of appropriate use

through his choice of questions and limiting teens' opportunities to develop their own norms and expectations for online behaviour (Mattson, 2016).

Mattson has recently published a digital citizenship curriculum called *Ethics in a Digital World* (2021), in which she argues for a curriculum which produces "thoughtful, empathetic digital citizens who can wrestle with the important ethical questions at the intersection of technology and humanity" (Mattson, 2021, p. 14). In this curriculum, Mattson invites students to examine their personal digital ethics through some of the ethical frameworks such as virtue ethics, utilitarian ethics and deontological ethics. This curriculum is as user-friendly as Ribble's, since it provides lesson plans, resources, lesson ideas and articles around each topic, and connects each topic to the relevant ISTE standards. It is based on six big ethical questions, each of which is explored in detail:

1. Access to Information: Is it time to better regulate the internet?

2. Privacy in the Digital Age: How much are you willing to give up?

3. Human Bias: Can Artificial Intelligence help diminish human bias in decision-making?

4. Technology and Mental Health: Cause or cure?

5. Social Media and Society: Flashlight or fame?

Mattson's curriculum is undeniably more topical than Ribble, although that is to be expected, given the time-lag between the publishing of the two curricula. The topics in this curriculum deal with misinformation, algorithms, content moderation, big data, surveillance, personal privacy, Artificial Intelligence, job automation, internet addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social media and hashtag activism, among others. In contrast to Ribble's curriculum, Mattson's curriculum moves away from merely teaching students about their personal responsibility in digital spaces as users

and consumers of technology, towards a more holistic understanding of technology

ethics, that is, the application of ethical thinking to the development of new

technologies and to the refinement of existing ones. In the introduction, she writes:

> Instead of using the digital citizenship curriculum as an attempt to correct or prevent
>
> misbehaviors online, we needed a proactive approach to equip students with the
>
> necessary skills to be active, engaged citizens in their digital communities. This shift
>
> meant encouraging educators to set aside the once-a-year assembly on cyberbullying,
>
> conduct purposeful work in classrooms year-round, and create opportunities for
>
> students to practice digital citizenship skills under the guidance of educators (Mattson,
>
> 2021, p. 14).

Another important difference between Ribble and Mattson's curricula is that

Mattson's curriculum is not as normative as Ribble's. It invites students to think

critically about each topic, without presenting any of the issues as a clear black and

white topic with right and wrong answers. Although the titles come across as rather

simplistic and reductionist, the way they are presented in the book clearly

acknowledges ethical dilemmas and multiple perspectives on each topic, and helps

teachers asks some thought-provoking questions about the nature of technology, the

tensions between privacy and security and the role of bias in Artificial Intelligence,

among others. This approach is heavily based on discussion in the classroom, giving

importance to ethical thinking and decision making.

The Council of Europe's Model of Digital Citizenship Education

In 2016, the Council of Europe launched an inter-governmental project called 'Digital

Citizenship Education' (DCE). One of the key aims of this project was to "contribute to

reshaping the role that education plays in enabling all children to acquire the competences

they need as digital citizens to participate actively and responsibly in democratic society, whether offline or online" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 6). Over the last decade, the Council of Europe has mainly focused on children's safety and protection in the digital environment. This project was embarked upon in recognition of the fact that the concept of digital citizenship has evolved over these last few years. The goal of the project is for schools to "provide young citizens with innovative opportunities to develop the values, attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary for every citizen to participate fully and assume their responsibilities in society" (Council of Europe, n.d.).

The first task of the project was for an expert group to conduct a review of literature on the concept of digital citizenship and consult the various stakeholders on the place of Digital Citizenship Education in schools. After this initial task, the goal was to produce a handbook for parents and educators which includes a set of resources that can be used with students in order to explore three main areas of digital citizenship (Council of Europe, 2019). The handbook is divided into three sections:

Section 1: Being online – Information related to how we engage and exist online, comprising three digital domains: access and inclusion, learning and creativity and media and information literacy.

Section 2: Well-being online – Information related to how we feel online, comprising another three digital domains: ethics and empathy, health and well-being, and e-presence and communications.

Section 3: Rights online – Information related to being accountable online, comprising the final four digital domains: active participation, rights and responsibilities, privacy and security and consumer awareness (Council of Europe, 2019).

As is evident from the above, the DCE project aims to empower children through education or through the acquisition of specific competences for learning and participating

actively in a digital society. These competences enable children and youths to claim and

defend their democratic rights, behave responsibly, and protect human rights, democracy and

the rule of law in digital environments. Thus, digital citizenship is considered to be a new

dimension of Citizenship Education, one that focuses on the digital environment.

The Council of Europe has long promoted citizenship education as a way of helping

youths live together side by side in an increasingly globalised manner. One of the ways that

it aims to support educators is through a framework of competences to help students live

together, as democratic citizens in diverse societies. This framework aims to instil in students

the important values of tolerance and respect, as well as a firm understanding of their various

rights and responsibilities towards others (Council of Europe, 2016). This framework, which

is known as the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture 'butterfly'

breaks down 20 citizenship competences into four groups: values, attitudes, skills and

knowledge and critical understanding (VASK) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The 20 competences for democratic culture

Values
- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

Attitudes
- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Respect
- Civic-mindedness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity

Competence

Skills
- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Skills of listening and observing
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Co-operation skills
- Conflict-resolution skills

Knowledge and critical understanding
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

Figure 1: The 20 Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2016).

This competence framework has been adapted for the digital environment in which

this generation of young people are growing up in. Although the Council of Europe has

provided a digital citizenship education handbook with resources as a suggestion of how this framework can be implemented, it does not suggest that this is the only way that this can be done. In fact, before compiling the handbook, the working groups documented some of the good practices in Europe that promote digital citizenship.

The information and activities in this handbook (Council of Europe, 2019) place a big emphasis on the ethical implications and the responsibility that comes with the use of technology. They are underpinned by the Competences for Democratic Culture butterfly (above), adapted for the digital age. The first section of the handbook is called "Being Online". It deals with the issues of the digital gap and highlights the importance of inclusion. This section aims to instil competences which help to overcome the digital divide and encourage the inclusion of minority groups and diversity of opinion in online spaces. It also incorporates media and information literacy (MIL), an umbrella concept which covers three dimensions: information literacy, media literacy and ICT/digital literacy. However, it is not restricted to MIL: "While media and information literacy (MIL) is how we think (critical thinking) about all of the media around us, digital citizenship refers to how we live and how we engage with all of the technology around us" (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 49). In this section, the handbook focuses on the issue of fake news, making students aware of the phenomenon of fake news and suggesting activities aimed at teaching media literacy.

The second section of the handbook, called "Wellbeing Online", focuses on ethics and empathy:

> Empathy and ethics are at the core of the Council of Europe's competence model, since they are based on an understanding of the values of human dignity and human rights, and shaped by an attitude of respect for, and a sense of responsibility towards, others, as well as through a solid knowledge and critical understanding of oneself (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 60).

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The handbook acknowledges that ethics and empathy are first taught and modelled at home, but states that when children start attending school, they interact with others who might have different values, perspectives and moral codes. This is extended even further as they grow up and start venturing online. The "friendly, non-obtrusive" guidelines of parents and teachers will serve to equip students with a "moral compass to navigate successfully through this new reality, providing a means of ethically tackling the biases and challenges they will inevitably encounter along the way" (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 62). This section explores issues such as bullying, hate speech and radicalisation, with the overarching objective of developing empathy towards others. It also features a section on health and wellbeing, focusing on physical health, such as ergonomics, and mental health, such as self-esteem. Finally, it considers issues such as the digital footprint, privacy and control over personal data.

The third and final section, "Rights Online", deals with the rights and responsibilities that come with active online participation. This section is based on the fundamental values of democracy, justice, fairness, human dignity and respect, stating that "You have the right to use any and all digital technologies, and you have the responsibility to use them in a safe and responsible manner" (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 100). This section ties in neatly with the previous sections, as it discusses the digital divide in terms of human rights and in terms of inclusion. It also covers issues such as copyright, digital piracy and plagiarism, as well as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), introduced by the European Union in 2018. It also discusses cyber security, advocating for teaching children how to protect their privacy and security online. It cautions that although one can make good use of cyber-security tools, digital citizens must still make good use of their critical thinking skills in order not to fall prey to online propaganda and unethical business practices. Finally, it promotes consumer awareness, acknowledging that the internet can be a useful tool in aiding awareness of

consumer rights, but also advocating vigilance when making online purchases. This handbook was followed by another publication which focuses specifically on gaming. It discusses some of the risks associated with gaming, such as loot boxes, online hate speech, violent content, gender stereotypes and video game addiction (Council of Europe, 2021).

The Digital Citizenship Education Model is a very useful tool in the teaching of digital citizenship. First of all, it takes into account most of the recent developments that have had effects on society, such as the issues of privacy, fake news and the digital gap. One of its merits is that it has a wider scope than teaching students how to behave responsibly online. In fact, it gives a very good overview of most of the issues that young people face when going online. Furthermore, is well researched and not overly prescriptive, leaving it up to educators to develop their own activities. It is not tied to a particular curricular subject; the idea is that different schools can incorporate it into different programmes of study, depending on their different needs and logistical considerations.

Although this handbook is a very good resource, it is not sufficient in itself, because it does not go far enough in discussing issues of identity, behaviour and relationships. For example, the issues of sexting, revenge porn and online pornography are not mentioned at all, while bullying, hate speech and radicalisation are not discussed in detail. However, it can be argued that this model is just a framework and the handbook that comes along with it is not intended to be the only resource that is used by schools. In fact, the handbook advocates for a very open approach, suggesting resources and discussions about topics, rather than rigid lesson plans and activities.

The Teaching of Digital Citizenship in Malta

As explained earlier, there is very little academic literature on the teaching of digital citizenship in Malta, with two notable exceptions, both in the form of Masters' dissertations.

One of these studies focused on the teaching of digital citizenship via Personal Social and Career Development (PSCD) in Maltese primary schools (Pace, 2019), while the other study focused on the teaching of cyberethics via the teaching of Ethics in Year 9 (Barbara, 2019). Although informative, Pace's study is not very relevant to my research question since it tackles the teaching of digital citizenship at primary school level. On the other hand, Barbara's research, which focuses on the perspectives of teachers who taught Ethics in year 9 in secondary school, is significant to this study. In fact, this study builds on the findings of Barbara's research.

In his research study, Barbara found that teachers of Ethics were very much concerned with issues of cyberbullying, internet addiction and sexting. They were particularly worried about cases of cyberbullying, which was reported to be happening "constantly" (Barbara, 2019, p. 28) in the schools that they taught in. They were also concerned about cases of sexting, which was mentioned as often as cyberbullying. When asked about issues related to cyberethics that had recently cropped up in their respective schools, some of the respondents also mentioned the posting of harmful content, unwanted messages that female students had received from older males and the use of anonymous fake profiles, in addition to the above topics. Although the majority of the respondents stated that the Ethics syllabus was effective when dealing with such topics, some of them did not feel fully prepared to teach these topics. This was mostly due to the fact that they did not feel that they had had enough training, and because of the constant struggle of keeping up to date with such issues. It is quite worrying to note that none of the respondents felt the responsibility to keep up to date with new technologies, claiming that it was the responsibility of their employer to provide them with training. Most of the respondents remarked on the fact that it was unfortunate that Ethics was not a mainstream subject, since the teaching of cyberethics is important and was very well received by students (Barbara, 2019).

Although this research study is very relevant to my research question, it only tackles digital citizenship, or cyberethics, through the teaching of Ethics in Maltese schools in one particular year group. Furthermore, the data were collected from only seven participants, and is not as rich as one might have hoped for. Thus, through my research, I aim to obtain a more complete picture of the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to critically assess some of the literature on how people make use of media and digital technologies, and how they navigate their sense of self and identity, as well as their relationships with others in the age of technology and social media. It also reviewed some of the relevant literature on online harms and the role of schools in teaching digital citizenship.

The first section focused on the fact that this generation of youths have grown up surrounded with technology, in fact it is ubiquitous and central to how young people communicate with others. The data are clear about the fact that Maltese youths make frequent use of digital technologies and social media to connect with friends (Inchley et al., 2020). Although this is not concerning in itself, the question is whether such regular use of digital technologies is harmful to their safety and wellbeing. Although Floridi's "onlife" concept (Floridi, 2007, p. 62) is useful in understanding how the constant use of technology is blurring the boundaries between the online and the offline, the veracity of the claim that digital technologies have an adverse effect on empathy is far from clear. Some researchers, like Turkle (2016, 2021) and Bugeja (2005), have argued that it is affecting the quality of our relationships, even reducing our levels of empathy. However, I have argued that although such claims might be true in some circumstances, more often than not, the reality is much

more nuanced than this doomsday scenario, and in some cases, technology and new media actually help people stay in touch and support each other.

Other researchers, such as Suler (20004), focus on the affordance of anonymity on social media and the potential to cause harm to others. Much has been written on online harms such as cyberbullying, sexting, online pornography, online hate speech and extremism, which, unarguably, have become an intrinsic part of some teenagers' lives. Thus, the second part of this chapter focused on these issues. Although the data on how Maltese youths experience such online harms are scant, findings from the EU Kids Online survey suggest that Maltese secondary school students experience cyberbullying, sexting, online pornography and online hate speech on a regular basis. However, it must be noted that there is a dearth of research on how Maltese youths deal with such issues. This is probably due to the fact that it has become particularly hard for researchers to gain access to children as 'data subjects', especially when investigating topics which, for many people, still remain taboo.

The aim of this research is not to suggest that youths have become completely desensitised or morally corrupt. For many youths, especially in most parts of the first world, digital media are increasingly being used to communicate and reach out to others, as well as to seek answers to questions about their personal identity, or 'what makes me me'. Therefore the case for studying how youths use digital media and the effects these media have on their sense of identity, their morality and relationships with each other is very compelling, because until we know where the problems lie, we cannot hope to start addressing them.

The third and final part of this chapter focused on the role of education in helping youths navigate the potentially murky waters of technology and social media. One of the traditional aims of education has always been to socialise students into the norms and values of society. Although society is in a constant state of flux, and the accepted norms and values seem to be changing, we can still teach children and youths that traditional values such as

responsibility and respect for others are also applicable to online interactions. This is not just about teaching students how to avoid predators, harassment or cyberbullying – it is about them having an ethical framework, which encompasses all aspects of life, even that which takes place online. This type of education goes by various names, such as cyberethics, digital ethics and digital citizenship. The one I have mostly focused on is the latter, because it is a better-known term and has become synonymous with curricula that aim to teach students how to behave more ethically in digital spaces.

Chapter 3: Empirical Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline the methodology adopted to undertake my empirical research. The chapter lays out the philosophical underpinnings and assumptions that shape the research and justifies the use of some research methodologies and data collection methods over others. It includes a rationale for the choice of participants, the interviewing process and the use of thematic analysis as an analytical method. Finally, it also lays out the ethical considerations that are pertinent to this study.

Aims of the research

This research aimed to investigate how Maltese secondary schools teach digital citizenship, that is, how they promote the ethical use of digital technologies and new media. Like their counterparts across the globe, Maltese youths are increasingly using digitally-mediated means of communication and must sometimes make choices about how to behave online. Thus, the main aim of this research was to investigate how Maltese secondary schools are promoting ethical online behaviour in order to prepare these youths for their lives in the digital world, which is increasingly becoming more complex and challenging.

The study focused on secondary schools for two reasons. Firstly, secondary school students are the ones who spend the most time online and are more likely to be unsupervised by their adults while doing so. They are also more likely to come across harmful material online, and to engage in practices such as sexting, revenge porn, online harassment and the dissemination of misinformation and extremist content. Another reason for focusing on secondary schools rather than primary and middle schools is that most secondary schools in Malta tend to follow the same syllabi, since they are set nationally and lead to locally-

accredited qualifications. This makes it easier to generalise the findings across Maltese schools, although the transferability to other contexts (outside Malta) is very limited.

This research examined the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools via the qualitative case-study approach. This was done through the analysis of qualitative interviews with experts, policy makers and practitioners in the field, as well as the review of national school curricula, syllabi and policies. The rationale behind the choice of this approach was that the data obtained from the analysis of these documents and the interviews would provide a snapshot of how digital citizenship is currently being taught in Maltese State schools. Speaking to experts and policy makers with years of experience, as well as practitioners (heads of schools, assistant heads of schools and teachers), aimed to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Qualitative Research

I chose to employ a qualitative approach for this study. This approach was chosen for a number of reasons, which will be discussed in this section.

The history of doing qualitative research is extensive, based on the practice of studying humankind over the centuries, and is often used by social psychologists, ethnographers and historians (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1982; Stake, 1978). One objective of qualitative research is to shed light on and understand better the rich lived experiences of human beings and the world which they inhabit (Jones et al., 2006). This is one of the reasons why qualitative research is often employed in educational research and the social sciences: "The so-called qualitative turn that has overtaken the social sciences in the last twenty-five years has yielded both a rich body of research using non-statistical methods and a substantive amount of methodological advice on how to engage in qualitative inquiry" (Prasad, 2005, p. 3).

First and foremost, a qualitative method approach was favoured due to the particular research question, which, as has been outlined above, aims to investigate how Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies and new media, relying on the perceptions of the participants, as well as the analysis of various documents. Qualitative methodologies are particularly useful in discovering the meaning that individuals give to the events that they experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). They are also useful when the nature of the research requires an in-depth, rich understanding of what is happening relative to the research question. Thus, qualitative research questions often begin with 'How?' or 'What?', which allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of what is being studied (Patton, 2002). The main research question for this study was: How do Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies and new media? This research question was broken down into three sub-questions, all of which were also 'How' questions.

Secondly, a qualitative research design is thought to be the best approach when trying to understand social processes in context, while also exploring the meanings of social events for those who are involved in them (Esterberg, 2002).

Thirdly, a qualitative approach relies on the researcher as an active participant in the study (Creswell, 2005). Although this has its drawbacks, which will be discussed later on in this chapter, qualitative approaches often rely on the researcher as the main instrument of data collection and the interpreter of the data (Stake, 1995). For this study, I, as the researcher, collected and interpreted all the data.

Fourthly, a main feature of a qualitative approach is the use of multiple sources of evidence, rather than relying on a single source (Yin, 2011). For this study, I combined the analysis of policy documents and syllabi with information that I obtained from the participants. I asked policy makers, experts, heads of schools and teachers about these policy

documents and curricula, to find out whether my interpretations of these documents were indeed correct. This approach allowed me to study phenomena such as the perceptions and points of view of the participants, which would have been impossible to access through a quantitative approach.

The Case-Study Approach

The use of the case-study approach in educational research also has a long history. It has arisen out of the need to study processes and dynamics of practice (Candappa, 2017). However, one of the main problems with doing case-study research is the lack of consensus on what actually constitutes a case-study. Candappa maintains that this is because historically, case-studies have been used by different professionals in different contexts, with different meanings. She contends that the case-study approach is neither a method nor a methodology, but a flexible approach for doing research (ibid).

There are many case-study researchers, but for this research, I relied mostly on Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), Yin (2002) and Candappa (2017). Merriam describes the case-study approach as "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Thus, the case in question can be a particular person, a group of persons, a programme, a specific policy, and so on. Her definition is influenced by Miles and Huberman's (1994) conceptualisation of the case as a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Stake (1995) also describes the case-study approach as a strategy for the in-depth exploration of a programme, event, activity, process or individual. According to Stake, cases are also found in a context, and the job of researchers is to collect detailed information about the case, using a variety of data collection methods over a defined period of time.

Candappa lays out four different types of case-study. The first is the exploratory case-study, which is often associated with the first exploratory phase of the research. The second type is the descriptive case-study, which describes a particular case in great detail. The third type is the explanatory case-study, which seeks to provide explanations for an event or phenomenon. Finally, Candappa describes evaluative case-studies as approaches which are increasingly being used in policy research to analyse particular programmes, projects and initiatives in order to evaluate their effectiveness (Candappa, 2017). Stenhouse (1988) describes the evaluative case-study employed in education research in this manner:

> In evaluative case studies a single case or collection of cases is studied in depth with the purpose of providing educational actors or decision makers (administrators, teachers, parents, pupils, etc.) with information that will help them to judge the merit and worth of policies, programmes or institutions (Stenhouse, 1988, p. 50).

In light of the above, I opted for the case-study as an approach to conducting this research study. The 'case' that is being studied has very clear boundaries, since this study aims to investigate the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools. I consider this research to be an evaluative case-study, since its primary aim is to evaluate the extent to which the Maltese educational system teaches secondary school students how to use digital technologies and new media in an ethical manner.

Yin (2002) favours the use of both quantitative and qualitative data in an effort to triangulate the case-study, while Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) both suggest that the researcher only employs qualitative data in a case-study. Stake's definition of legitimate data for case-study methodology is much more extensive. He argues that "A considerable proportion of all data is impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case" (Stake, 1995, p. 49). He suggests that the researcher's impressions are useful also when interpreting the data, defining data analysis as "a matter of giving

meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (ibid., p. 71). Merriam also

alludes to the reciprocal/reflexive/back and forth nature of data interpretation:

> The researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which
>
> interacts with other people's constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being
>
> studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the
>
> researcher of others' views filtered through his or her own (Merriam, 1998, p. 22).

One of the limitations of qualitative case-studies is the difficulty in transferability of

the findings. Due to the particular location of my research, that is, a very small

Mediterranean island, it is practically impossible to transfer the research findings to other

contexts, such as educational systems in different countries. It is also rather difficult to apply

concepts of rigorous objectivity to qualitative research. According to Merriam, "reality is not

an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality" (Merriam, 1998, p.

22). Thus, my aim was to understand the meaning or knowledge as constructed by people in

this particular context, keeping in mind my role as researcher in this construction of meaning.

In spite of this limitation, there are steps that a researcher can take in order to enhance

the trustworthiness of the study's findings, which will be elucidated upon later on in the

chapter.

Philosophical Framework

As a researcher in education, I find myself drawn to constructivism as a philosophical

framework, due to its emphasis on the researcher's role of data gatherer and interpreter. Stake

highlights the view that "knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we

know is a particularly human construction" (Stake, 1995, p. 99). Thus, constructivism,

according to Stake, conceives of knowledge as a series of social interpretations, rather than

awareness of external reality. This differs from positivistic research, which aims for

objectivity on the part of the researcher in order to obtain the 'true' and objective snapshot of reality.

Crotty (1998) suggests that positivistic research is based on the three pillars of objectivity, validity and generalizability. However, these three concepts cannot be readily applied to qualitative research, since these concepts originated in the positivistic tradition. Merriam's view on data validation is very clear: "One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p.202). However, as will be explained later, this does not mean that there is no attempt at objectivity, validity and reliability when conducting this kind of research; it simply means that these concepts are conceptualised differently.

Crotty (1998) has identified a number of assumptions on which constructivism is based, some of which are vital to this study. Crotty believes that people engage with their world and construct meaning based on their historical and social perspectives, which means that the construction of meaning is always social, arising through interaction with other human beings. As Maykut and Morehouse note:

> The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123).

Thus, qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions, allowing the participants to provide elaborate answers which the researchers can then interpret. This interpretation will inherently be affected by the researcher's own historical and social perspectives, which implies that the findings and research interpretations in constructivist research is essentially context-specific and cannot easily be transferable to other contexts.

Research Design

 For this study, data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten experts or policy makers, three heads or assistant heads of schools (one from each sector: State, Church and Independent Schools) and eight teachers. Some of the participants were also involved in the writing of national syllabi and national education policies. The interviews, most of which took approximately forty minutes, were conducted and digitally recorded, transcribed and, in some cases, also translated, and then coded for emergent themes. I also reviewed documents, such as policies and syllabi, which were publicly available on various websites, such as that of the local examination body and the official state education website. The documents were analysed alongside the interviews in order to triangulate the research. I also checked the most recent uploaded documents every few months to make sure that nothing in them had changed in the meantime. This was important, since the education system was going through curricular changes at the time of writing.

 Most of the participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources, selecting only participants who can be considered to be 'key informants' (Patton, 2002). According to Patton, key informants are people who are particularly knowledgeable about the field of study, and whose insights can provide answers to answer the research questions (ibid.). Thus, all the experts and policy makers were recruited through purposeful sampling, while some of the teachers and heads or assistant heads of school were recruited through snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This meant asking participants to suggest other participants who might be interested in being involved in the research and asking for their email addresses.

Eight of the participants were teachers who, at the time of data collection, were teaching Ethics, Social Studies, PSCD, ICT, Media Literacy or a combination of these subjects in different Maltese secondary schools. Three of the participants were heads or assistant heads of schools, while the rest of the participants were experts and/or policy makers, including Education Officers, Directors, and the Minister of Education who was incumbent at the time of the data collection.   In total, I interviewed 21 participants. The number of participants was based on feasibility, due to time restrictions and the scope of the study. I decided to interview ten policy makers and experts, since they all had different roles and expertise on different aspects of educational policies. I chose to interview three heads or assistant heads of schools, aiming for one participant per sector (State, Church and Independent schools), and eight teachers who taught some of the subjects that seemed to be most promising in terms of content related to digital citizenship. As explained earlier, I did not interview secondary school students, due to the fact that it is very difficult to obtain permission to conduct interviews with Maltese students, especially when the research involved asking them questions about topics such as sexting and pornography, which are still considered to be very controversial in a Maltese context.

After obtaining permission to conduct research from the UCL IoE research ethics committee, I obtained permission from the institutional gatekeepers (the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability and the Secretariat for Catholic Education) (See Appendix 3). Then, I proceeded to send recruitment emails to the experts and/or policy makers, using email addresses which were publicly available on local websites. All the experts and policy makers who were approached agreed to be interviewed, except for the Commissioner for Children, who nominated a representative who could speak on her behalf. Then, I proceeded to recruit the heads or assistant heads of schools and the teachers through snowball sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). I contacted these potential participants via

email, explaining what the research involved and why I wanted to interview them. In the case of the teachers, I contacted their heads of schools for permission before interviewing them on school premises.

All of the participants were interviewed between January and July of 2019. For the sake of convenience, interviews were held in the participants' offices or schools.

Data Collection Methods

Interviews

The decision to conduct participant interviews was based on three reasons. The first reason is that interviews allow a researcher to understand the meaning of a participant's "lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 105) and find out what is in and on someone else's mind, something that cannot be easily observed otherwise (Patton, 2002). The second reason is that data from participant interviews often result in thick descriptions (Merriam, 2009). Through the interviews, I was able to gather some rich data about the topic. The interviews were based on a series of open-ended questions which were designed to encourage the participants to respond freely and openly to the questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Esterberg, 2002; Kvale, 1996). These questions differed according to the different participants. The teachers were all asked the same set of questions, the heads of schools were asked another set of questions, while the experts/policy makers were asked different questions, according to their background and expertise (See Appendix 2). The following is a sample of some of the questions asked:

Teachers

- How does the school that you teach in promote ethical online behaviour?

- Which curricular subjects tackle this topic?

- Which subject/s do you teach?

- How does this subject deal with this topic?

- Do you think that the current curriculum tackles this topic effectively?

- Are there any cross-curricular or extra-curricular activities that promote ethical online behaviour that take place in the school that you teach in?

Heads of Schools

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- How do you promote ethical online behaviour in your school?

- Do you think that the current curriculum tackles this topic effectively?

- Do you give teachers any particular training? Can you elaborate on this?

- Are there any particular issues that you think need to be tackled?

- Do you think that enough is being done in this regard?

- Do you have any suggestions for better practice?

Policy Makers

- To what extent does Information Technology affect the lives of young people?

- Do you think that teaching about digital citizenship is important in today's world? Why/Why not?

- Are you aware of any worrying trends that you think should be addressed by schools?

- Do you think that new curricula, such as Ethics and the revamped ICT curriculum, help to promote ethical behaviour online?

- Is there a national strategy for the teaching of digital citizenship?

- If yes, how was this strategy developed? Was it based on any research? What kind of funding is allocated to it?

- How do you think that schools should deal with issues pertaining to digital citizenship?

I decided to use the semi-structured interview approach (Merriam, 2009), which gives the participants the opportunity to "diverge slightly from the script" (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p.4) and the researcher to ask probing and/or follow up questions to encourage participants to elaborate on or clarify a response (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Since Malta is a bilingual country, with Maltese and English both being official languages, some interviews were conducted solely in English, while most were conducted in both languages, with frequent code-switching between Maltese and English.

The interview is often viewed as a conversation between the researcher and the participant, in which the researcher, in the role of the interviewer, asks questions and the participant (the interviewee) responds accordingly (Esterberg, 2002). Since this study relied on the perspectives of experts, policy makers and practitioners in the field, their perspectives and experiences were fundamental to the research question. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to elucidate their perspectives and experiences in order to provide me, as a researcher, with a rich tapestry of data which I was then able to interpret in order to get a snapshot of the current educational practices with regards to the teaching of digital ethics in Malta. In accordance with the interpretative nature of qualitative methodologies, the participants all provided a nuanced perspective on the subject, depending on their current position, previous background and personal experiences.

This final point leads to the third reason why interviews were selected as a tool for this research study. Participant interviews allow for the triangulation of information from other sources, thus increasing the credibility and reliability of the findings (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). The data obtained from the interviews were triangulated with the data obtained from the official documents, which were all freely available online on official websites.

Document Analysis

One of the data collection methods that was employed was an analysis of the policy documents and official curricula and syllabi. Document analysis is a recognised form of qualitative research in which the researcher interprets documents in order to give meaning to the research findings. It is an important research tool in its own right, and can be a very good way of triangulating the data (Bowen, 2009). According to O'Leary (2014), there are three types of documents that can be analysed: public records, personal documents and physical evidence. For this research, I analysed the following public records, all of which could be found online in the public domain:

- The National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012a)
- The Outcomes Learning Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2015)
- The National Digital Strategy 2014-2020 (Digital Malta, 2014)
- The national syllabi of: Ethics, PSCD, Social Studies (General and Option), Media Literacy (VET and SEAC), ICT, Information Technology (VET and SEAC) (Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, 2022; MATSEC, 2022)
- The Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Schools Policy

- How to deal with cyberbullying: Guidelines for senior management team (Ministry for Education and Employment, n.d).

The analysis of the policy documents and official curricula was crucial to the research findings. As explained earlier, it provided a means of triangulation which either supported the data provided by the participants, or at times, contradicted them. For example, it was interesting to note that some participants, especially the policy makers, tended to overstate the impact of their work, and the official documents sometimes exposed this gap between their perceptions and what was filtering down to teachers in schools. Furthermore, the documents provided invaluable data on the contexts within which the research participants operated (Bowen, 2009), providing data which could contextualise the data which were collected during the participant interviews. The documents were analysed before the participant interviews were conducted, in order to enable me as a researcher to ask the right questions and to be able to make sense of the participants' answers. They were reanalysed during the report-writing stage in order avoid missing crucial information and to make sure that I was analysing the latest versions of the documents, especially since the syllabi were in the process of being rewritten while the participant interviews were being conducted.

Two main drawbacks of using documents as a source of data is the potential misinterpretation of documents, and the possibility of the documents being out of date (Bretschneider et al., 2017). Thus, I always made sure to check with the participants whether the documents that I was analysing were the latest versions, and I strived to avoid potential misrepresentation of the documents by asking the participants pertinent questions about them.

The documents were analysed via generated codes, using the Braun and Clarke (2006) method of data analysis, which is explained in further detail below. First, I familiarised myself with the documents by reading through them, looking out for keywords such as: technology, online, social media, new media, digital, digital citizenship, cyberbullying,

sexting, revenge porn, online pornography, hate speech and radicalisation. These keywords helped me select the data which were relevant to this study. Then, I produced some initial codes attached to this data, which led to the generation of themes. The Braun and Clarke (2006) method of data analysis, which was used for the document analysis, is explained in more detail in the section below.

Data analysis

As elucidated by Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995, 1978), the analysis of the data is also influenced by the researchers themselves. Researchers typically influence the findings of their study through the choice of the research questions, the research methods, the choice of participants, the research instruments and finally, through their interpretation of the data.

Merriam (1998) defines data analysis as "the process of making sense out of the data". She goes on to say that "making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Thus, qualitative data analysis is a form of intellectual craftsmanship, more akin to a creative process than a mechanical one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Esterberg suggests that qualitative researchers' main objective should be immersing themselves in interview transcripts and "getting intimate with data" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 157).

The data analysis and coding procedures followed in this thesis are based on the Braun and Clarke method of thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Widely used in psychology research, thematic analysis is a very flexible approach which can provide a rich and detailed account of data (King, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is particularly useful for studying the perspectives of different participants, highlighting

similarities and differences in their outlooks, and producing unanticipated insights. It also makes researchers take a structured approach to handling large data sets, helping them to write clear and organised final reports (King, 2004). However, the flexibility of thematic analysis can lead to inconsistency and incoherence unless the study's empirical claims are supported by an explicit epistemological position (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Thus, researchers should make available an audit trail, which provides evidence of all the choices made regarding theoretical and methodological issues, as well as provide a rationale for making these choices (Koch, 1994).

This research study followed Braun and Clarke's six steps during the data analysis process. Although they are described in linear order, in reality it is an iterative and reflective process that involves the researcher going back and forth between the six stages.

Step 1: Familiarising Yourself with Your Data

During the first step, I started familiarising myself with the data by reading all the policy documents and transcribing the data generated from the participant interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, with no attempt at translation from Maltese to English. All the raw data were archived in order to provide an audit trail. The collection of data and the subsequent transcription of the data helped me immerse myself in the data and familiarise myself with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This started the process of identification of some patterns and themes. In order to immerse myself further in the data, I decided not to use any coding software, so I used Microsoft Word to transcribe the data and generate codes. Being involved in the research process from beginning to end also meant that I did not have to contend with inconsistent structures generated by different researchers.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

After having familiarised myself with the data, I started producing some initial codes attached to the raw data. This step involved a process of reflection about what was salient about the data, and then attaching codes, or labels, to loosely group pieces of data into vague and imprecise themes. The codes aimed to capture the interesting aspects of the data, sometimes using the actual language of the participants. The codes were all generated in English, even though some participants frequently switched between Maltese and English. The code-switching did not pose any issues, because the Maltese are used to speaking both languages, often switching between the two in the same sentence.

Step 3: Searching for Patterns or Themes

The next step involved an in-depth analysis of the generated codes in order to sort them into broad themes. The themes were generated inductively from the raw data, that is, they were based on the analysis of the documents and the participants' words, rather than on theories or preconceptions. This makes the analysis data driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some of the broad themes were further explored in sub-themes, while some codes did not fit in any of the broad themes.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

The fourth step necessitates the refining of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some themes were collapsed into each other, while others were split into different themes. This made it possible to fit in most of the codes generated in the previous step into all the themes. The objectives of this step were to make sure that data within the same theme cohere

meaningfully, and to ensure that each theme was distinct and clearly identifiable from the other themes (ibid.). This was an iterative process that took some time, because I wanted to make sure that the themes told a coherent story about the data.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Step 5 involved naming and describing each of the themes. The themes were then organised in order according to the three sub research questions. The descriptions included a summary of each theme, what was interesting about it, why it was interesting and how it fit in with the research questions.

Step 6: Producing the Report

The final step involved writing the findings and discussion chapters, that is, the fourth and fifth chapters of my thesis. The write-up contains a number of direct quotes from the participants in order to give participants a voice and to give a reader a taste of the raw data. These quotes were embedded in the narrative in order to show the complexity of the data and convince the reader of the validity and merit of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The quotes which were in Maltese were translated into English.

Research Steps

This empirical part of this research study followed this protocol to ensure consistency with the goals of the study:

1.   After obtaining all ethical clearances, I made contact with the participants, inviting them to take part in the study.

2. Then, the participants were informed about the study and the risks involved (the consent forms and information sheets were sent to the participants prior to the interviews).

3. In-depth semi structured interviews were held with participants in their respective schools or offices.

4. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed within a day or two of the interviews.

5. The data were analysed for emergent themes.

The audit trail was documented throughout to ensure that the research steps can be easily verifiable.

Ethical Issues

Trustworthiness and Rigor

All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable results. In quantitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of measurement, or the degree to which a particular instrument consistently measures the same data under the same conditions. Reliability can often be estimated by re-measuring the data, or by grouping questions in a questionnaire that measure the same concept. Validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which a concept is accurately measured, that is, whether the research studies adequately what it has set out to research. Thus, for example, a survey that sets out to measure anxiety levels in people cannot be used to study depression, because although anxiety and depression are sometimes related, they are not the same thing (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

In the case of qualitative research, validity and reliability are conceptualised differently, although they are still very relevant. Firestone (1987) outlines how validity and reliability are dealt with differently in qualitative and quantitative research: "The quantitative

study must convince the reader that procedures have been followed faithfully because very little concrete description of what anyone does is provided. The qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion 'makes sense'" (Firestone, 1987, p. 19). Furthermore, "the quantitative study portrays a world of variables and static states. By contrast the qualitative study describes people acting in events" (ibid).

The terms 'validity' and 'reliability' are often contested when it comes to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).   For example, Lincoln & Guba (1985) use the parallel terms 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability' to talk about the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Credibility refers to the idea of internal validity, which is concerned with ensuring rigor in the research process and communicating it with others. Strategies for ensuring credibility include prolonged engagement with participants, researcher reflexivity, a good fit between the raw data and their analysis, and thick descriptions of the source data. Such descriptions involve detailed, rich descriptions, not only of the participants' experiences of the phenomena, but also of the contexts in which these phenomena occur. Transferability refers to external validity, that is, the extent to which a study can be applied to other contexts. Although transferability is often difficult to achieve, especially in case-study research, according to Lincoln and Guba, researchers should provide thick descriptions of the research context, the processes and the participants. It also helps when researchers, who themselves are the research instrument, provide a description of their relationship with the participants (ibid).

The parallel criterion of dependability (reliability) is concerned with whether the study can be replicated. Thus, dependability is achieved when the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Finally, confirmability (objectivity) is based on the assumption that qualitative research is never wholly objective, thus, the integrity of the findings depends on whether the researcher's interpretation and

findings are clearly derived from the data. In order to achieve confirmability, researchers should demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached. Koch (1994) suggests that researchers should include the reasons for their theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved.

Merriam (2009) suggests that ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting research in an ethical manner. Like Lincoln and Guba, she advocates for careful attention to the conceptualisation of a study, as well as the collection, analysis and interpretation of data and the way that findings of the study are presented.   She believes that one of the best ways of increasing the internal validity of a study is triangulation, which refers to using multiple methods, sources of data, investigators, or multiple theories to confirm research findings. Thus, in Merriam's words, using multiple sources of methods can mean that:

> what someone tells you in an interview can be checked against what you observe on site or what you read about in documents relevant to the phenomenon of interest. You have thus employed triangulation by using three methods of data collection — interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2009, p. 216).

In my research study, I employed triangulation by comparing the data found in the policy documents and syllabi with the data obtained via the interviews. Although it was not listed as a data collection method, my constant immersion in the Maltese educational system through my job also helped me make sense of the data. As an Education Officer, my job often involves conducting visits to Maltese schools, talking to teachers and working with policy makers on a regular basis. In fact, this leads to another strategy that Merriam advocates for, that is, an adequate engagement with data collection, or in other words, the

saturation of data. I believe that my constant immersion in the Maltese educational system has helped me to make sure that I have not overlooked any data which could be important to the research findings. Although my job within the Maltese educational system has proven to be largely beneficial, it was necessary for me to constantly reflect on my positionality as a researcher. Lincoln and Guba refer to this as reflexivity, or "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). This positionality will be further elucidated later on in this chapter, in a section dedicated to the topic.

In an effort to increase internal validity, Merriam (2009) also suggests the use of member checks, or respondent validation, which involves getting feedback on the findings which emerge from the data from some of the research participants. This ensures that the researcher's interpretation of the data 'rings true' to the participants who have contributed to the data collection. I have done this by discussing my findings with some of the participants and asking them whether I had understood their initial contributions well. Finally, Merriam also suggests the use of peer evaluation, that is, asking a peer to review some of the data to go through some of the raw data and the findings to assess whether the conclusions follow from the data. I have done this by asking a mentor from the University of Malta to go through the data and the research findings, and I have taken their feedback on board when writing the final draft.

According to Merriam (ibid) reliability is extremely difficult to achieve in qualitative research. However, she believes that it is more important to ensure that the results are consistent with the data collected, that is, that readers can depend on the results. She suggests four strategies to enhance reliability or dependability: triangulation, peer evaluation, researcher positionality and an audit trail. The first two have been dealt with above. Merriam suggests an audit trail as a way of enhancing the trustworthiness of a research study via a

description of the data collection processes and the decisions that were taken during the course of the study. This is often done in the methodology section of a study, often with supporting appendices. In fact, this is the purpose of this chapter. I have tried to describe as accurately as possible all the steps taken to conduct the study, including a rationale for the key decisions, and I have also provided some evidence of these steps in the supporting appendices. Merriam adds that:

> to a large extent, the validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator… These qualities are essential because as in all research, we have to trust that the study was carried out with integrity and that it involves the ethical stance of the researcher (Merriam, 2009, p. 228, 229).

She maintains that although all researchers should consider ethical issues such as the protection of research subjects from harm and their right to privacy and informed consent well ahead of time, sometimes researchers might face ethical dilemmas in the field during the course of their investigation. The resolution of these dilemmas often comes down to the researcher's own values and ethics, since they often depend on very particular circumstances which might not be adequately covered by policies, guidelines and published codes of ethics. Merriam points to the relationship between the researchers and the participants as a potential source of ethical issues, especially when using interviews as a data collection tool. Among other issues, she also mentions the question of anonymity in a qualitative case-study, suggesting that "at the local level, it is nearly impossible to protect the identity of either the case or the people involved (ibid, p. 233). These are some of the issues that I will take up in the next part of this chapter.

Participant Consent, Anonymity and Data Protection

Before starting the data collection, I obtained permission to conduct research from the UCL IoE research ethics committee, as well as from the institutional gatekeepers (the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability and Secretariat for Catholic Education) (See Appendix 3). When applying for permission to conduct research, I explained that all the participants would be adults who are not considered to be part of a vulnerable group, and that no risks to the participants were envisaged. One of the ethical issues that was foreseen was the burden placed upon the participants in terms of time commitments. The interviews were predicted to take approximately an hour of their time, and they were not to be given any awards or incentives as compensation. The only incentive for the participants was the fact that they would be contributing to research in their area of interest. I made it clear that this research is partly funded by the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme, but that the Scholarship Board would not limit the research in any way. I explained that no sensitive topics would be discussed with the participants and that the only personal data to be collected about the participants would be their names and occupations. Another ethical issue that I highlighted was the fact that Malta is a small country, so most of the participants would probably be acquaintances of mine, or in some cases, even colleagues. Unfortunately, this is something that cannot be avoided due to the small size of the population. However, in the case of teachers, I promised that care would be taken to select those whom I did not know well. This ethical consideration is something that I will be further elaborating on in the next section.

After recruiting the interview participants according to the steps explained above, I proceeded to hold face-to-face interviews with them. Before each interview, I handed the participants hard copies of an information sheet and consent form which I had already sent via email. The aim of the information sheet (Appendix 1) was to explain the purpose of the

research, the procedures, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and the

protection of confidentiality. I also provided some personal information about myself, as

well as the email addresses of my Principal Supervisor and the Chair of the UCL Research

Ethics Committee. Then, I asked the participants to sign the consent form (Appendix 1),

obtaining their consent to being audio-recorded. In the case of the experts and policy makers,

the consent form included three options of anonymity. The first option, which all the

participants in this group opted for, was for their real name and role/affiliation to be

disclosed. The second option was for the comments to be presented anonymously but their

role/affiliation to be connected with the comments (but not the title of their position) and the

third option was for their comments to be presented anonymously with no mention of their

role/affiliation. Although the experts and policy makers could opt for the second and third

option, their doing so would have meant that the data could not be used due to the high

probability that the participants would be identified, since their positions were rather

prominent. The heads or assistant heads of schools and the teachers were not given these

options. Instead, they were assured that their personal information would remain confidential

and that all efforts would be made to ensure that they cannot be identified. They were

assured that they would be given a pseudonym, and the schools that they work in would not

be identified. Furthermore, the consent forms which included their personal information

would be kept away from the raw data and the written report and kept in a secure location.

The teachers and the heads of schools were not asked any questions that would give away

their identity, such as age, experience, or the school that they taught in. This decision was

taken early on to make sure that participants would not be identifiable in any way. This is

due to the nature of conducting research on a small island. For example, there are only a

handful of private schools (called Independent Schools) on the island, so one must make sure

that the participants' identity is protected. Finally, none of the participants were asked any

questions that would divulge any sensitive personal data such as racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs or data concerning their health or sexual orientation. Thus, the data that were collected were fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Positionality

The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument (Evertson & Green, 1986). As indicated in the previous section, researchers bring their own life experiences and biases to the research (Foote & Bartell, 2011), which necessarily affects the research process. The way that these experiences affect the way that knowledge is created lies at the heart of constructivism. A constructionist approach highlights the impact that researchers' previous life experiences can have on the way they select their areas of research, their research methods, their data subjects and the way they interpret data. Since the researcher plays such a direct and key role in data collection and analysis, their identity can influence access to participants, the amount of information that participants are willing to divulge, as well as their interpretation of the data. Whether the participants perceive the researcher as an insider (a member of their group) or an outsider, as well as the researcher's status in relation to the participants, are essential characteristics of the research. According to Creswell, constructivist researchers "recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they "position themselves" in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

Thus, at this point, I would like to reflect on my own positionality in this research and on the way that my background and my identity have influenced the research process. This examination of my positionality can be described as reflexivity, which involves a self-

reflection on the part of the researcher in order to critically evaluate the research process with the aim of producing better and less distorted research accounts (Punch, 2009). Researcher positionality can impact all phases and stages of the research process:

> The positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes" (Foote & Bartell 2011 p. 46).

As a constructivist researcher, I recognise that my background in education has affected the research process in a number of ways, which I will reflect on below.

Like many educational researchers, I have made my career in education. After teaching in local secondary State schools for eleven years, I became an Ethics support teacher. After five years in this role, I was promoted to Education Officer for Ethics, which means that I am responsible for ensuring standards in the teaching of Ethics in State schools, drawing up syllabi and student assessment for Ethics, and providing teacher training. The data collection phase of my research coincided with my first year in the role of Education Officer. Although it was my first year in this role, my previous experience in the Maltese educational sector, as well as my academic background, put me in in a relatively privileged position as a researcher. This is because throughout the years, I had got to know most of the policy makers and the experts in the field, and I was very familiar with the educational setting that I was studying. This has proven to be mostly beneficial to the research; however, it has also posed some challenges. In attempting to study the research questions, I had to make conscious efforts to separate my role as Education Officer from that of my role of a researcher. Although I have tried to do this to the best of my ability, I am fully aware that I can never achieve total objectivity as an educational researcher, and in fact, this is one of the hallmarks of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Bloom 1996). Sikes suggests

that all researchers should reflect on their positioning and how it might influence their research. This is particularly important for educational research, which has often been criticised as being biased and partisan. (Sikes, 2004).

Research in familiar settings is very commonplace, especially in the fields of sociology and anthropology. This is also true of many educational researchers (Hockey, 1993). The merits and challenges of being an 'insider' to the research process have been well documented (Merton, 1972; Merriam et al., 2001; Weiner-Levy & Queder 2012). Space precludes a detailed consideration of all the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider, so I will focus on those that are particularly relevant to my research. One of the main advantages of being an insider was the easy access that I had to my participants. This included people in key positions, such as the incumbent Minister of Education (who served for ten years until January 2020), the Commissioner for Children, the Director General of Curriculum, Lifelong Learning and Employability, as well as other policy makers and experts in the field of education. My familiarity with the educational system and settings allowed me to interview my participants with relative ease, because I could 'speak their language'. It also allowed me to ask meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and in some cases, I could jog the participants' memories by providing cues or information that they would have forgotten about. Through my job as an Educational Officer, I was also involved in meetings during which I could gauge which policy makers, experts and practitioners could help me gather data in the most efficient way possible. Thus, I believe that being an insider has helped me acquire a more authentic understanding of the issue being studied by giving me access to participants, as well as a good understanding of the context.

Having said this, being an insider also poses some challenges such as the ones that Merriam (2009) refers to in her discussion of ethical issues. One of the main challenges that I found was that at times, asking questions that might expose deficiencies in the system felt

almost disloyal. In fact, I had to make it very clear that my role as a researcher was to identify the gaps in the system, since they cannot be tackled unless they are identified. I would like to think that the interviewing process has also had a positive effect on the policy makers, in that it brought attention to the topic being researched. Another challenge was to try to be as objective as possible when analysing the data, even if it meant exposing gaps in the system that I am partly responsible for. In order to do this, I immersed myself in the literature and tried to compare the Maltese syllabi with the literature. In fact, my research identified a gap in the Ethics syllabus (related to online extremism and radicalisation) that I was able to fill since the syllabus was in the process of being updated.

Power Dynamics

Another challenge posed by my job as an Education Officer was the issue of power dynamics. Although my research did not involve asking the participants any personal questions, I was keenly aware of the ethical issues that can be brought about by an imbalance of power. My participants could be roughly split into three groups. Some of the policy makers and experts who participated in the research were clearly above me in rank. These included the Minister of Education and Employment, the Director General and the Director for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills. Other participants, such as the various Education Officers and heads of schools were my peers in terms of hierarchy in the educational system. On the other hand, my position as Education Officer meant that I was above the teachers in rank.

The problems of doing research on peers have been well documented by Platt (1981) and Hockey (1993). As Platt points out, researchers are not typically familiar with their participants, and the assumption is that they do not belong to the same groups and will not meet again. However, one has to appreciate that Malta is a very small country, with a total

126

area of 316 square kilometres. Thus, this assumption will never hold, especially when you

consider that you are operating within a particular field, in this case, in the educational field.

This is especially true if the participants are one's peers. Platt makes it very clear that

interviewing peers is very different from the typical scenario in which the participant is a

total stranger and typically, of a subordinate position to the researcher. She states that it is

particularly true if one has a personalised relationship with the participant, as it is very

difficult to draw the boundaries between one's role as a researcher and one's role as a friend.

She suggests that the best way to surmount this is to engage in a kind of conscious role play:

> To the extent that the roles are successfully segregated, the interviewer-respondent
>
> relationship is revealed in all its nakedness as one of instrumental use of another
>
> person; for this segregation to be achieved, conscious role-playing is required (Platt,
>
> 1981, p. 78).

In my case, it helped that I was relatively new to the position of Education Officer, so

in some cases, I only knew some of the participants by sight, and I did not have any close

relationships with any of them. However, I made sure to make the interview as formal as

possible in order to make my role of a researcher clearly. After making the initial contact, I

made sure to send formal emails, explaining what my research was about and what the

interview would entail, and then I made sure that the interview would take place at their place

of work. I also tried to avoid too much small talk before the interviews, handing the

information sheets and consent forms to the participants as soon as politeness permitted it. I

also explained that I was there as a researcher and I might be asking questions which might

seem odd coming from me as an Educational Officer, but had to be asked for data collection

purposes. I found that explaining what there was written in the information sheets and

consent forms and asking the participants to sign them, and then starting to record the

conversation helped to formalise the interview and establish my role as a researcher. This

also helped when I was interviewing teachers, especially teachers who taught Ethics. In that case, I also made sure to remind them that my role at that point in time was that of a researcher.

The Participants

For this study, data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten researchers or policy makers, one head of school, two assistant heads of school (one head/assistant head from each sector: State, Church and Independent Schools) and eight teachers, some of whom were also involved in the writing of national syllabi.

The policy makers are all considered to be experts in their field and they all agreed to be named and for their data to be attributable for them. The following is a list of the experts or policy makers, together with some key information about their roles and expertise.

Hon. Evarist Bartolo is a former teacher and lecturer at the University of Malta. He served as the Minister of Education for ten years until January 2020 and was incumbent at the time of data collection.

Mr. Stephen Cachia was the Director General of the Directorate for Curriculum, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry of Education and Employment at the time of data collection.

Mr. Grazio Grixti is the Director of the Department for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills within the Directorate for Curriculum, Lifelong Learning and Employability.

Mr. Stephen Camilleri is one of the Educational Officers for Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD). He is also one of the board members of the BeSmartOnline Consortium.

Mr. Brian Chircop is the Educational Officer for Social Studies.

Mr. James Catania is the Educational Officer for Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Dr. Alex Grech is a strategist, change consultant, educator and speaker whose teaching, consulting and policy work focuses on Digital Identity, Digital Credentials, Blockchain, EdTech and Media Literacy. He is an expert on digital media literacy and new media and has served as an advisor to the Minister of Education on Educational Technologies. He has also written the National Lifelong Learning Strategy for Malta.

Prof. Kenneth Wain is a philosopher of education who has served as a Dean of the Faculty of Education. He has played a leading role in Malta's national educational policy development and wrote the Ethics syllabus when it was introduced in Maltese schools in 2014.

Mr. Mark Spiteri was the Project Coordinator of BeSmartOnline, which he coordinated for eight years. The interview was conducted a few weeks before his resignation.

Ms. Suzanne Garcia Imbernon was the representative of Ms. Pauline Miceli, the Commissioner for Children who was incumbent at the time of data collection. Ms. Garcia Imbernon has served on the board of BeSmartOnline for many years.

The second group of participants were heads or assistant heads of schools from the three different sectors: State, Independent and Church schools. They were given the following pseudonyms to protect their identity: Ms. Borg (State school), Mr. Zammit (Independent school) and Mr. Attard (Church School).

The third groups of participants were teachers. They were also given a pseudonym. Their pseudonym and the subject/s that they teach are shown in the following table:

Pseudonym	Subject/s
Ms. Mangion	ICT
Mr. Gatt	Ethics/PSCD
Ms. Farrugia	Ethics/Social Studies
Mr. Darmanin	Media Literacy
Ms. Magri	PSCD
Ms. Tanti	Ethics
Mr. Galea	ICT
Mr. Saliba	Media Literacy/PSCD

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to justify the choice of methodology employed to carry out this empirical research study. I chose to take a qualitative case-study approach due to a number of reasons. The main reason was that the research questions, which are evaluative and open-ended in nature, lend themselves very well to this approach. This research studies how Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies and new media. Thus, the evaluative case-study, which is often used to evaluate the effectiveness of particular programmes, policies or institutions (Stenhouse, 1988; Candappa, 2017) was deemed to be the best approach.

The methodology employed for the evaluative case-study was qualitative. Qualitative research questions often begin with 'How?', which allows the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of what is being studied. They are often used when studying phenomena in their natural setting and when exploring the meanings of events for those who are involved in them (Esterberg, 2002). I did this through the use of in-depth interviews with various

participants, such as policy makers, experts, heads or assistant heads of schools and teachers in their 'natural setting', that is, their schools or offices in educational institutions. One of the main features of qualitative approaches is the use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2011). This was achieved through the analysis of various policy documents and syllabi. Finally, qualitative approaches rely on the researcher as an active participant in the study (Creswell, 2005), acting both as the instrument of data collection and as the interpreter of data (Stake, 1995).

The philosophical orientation that underpins this approach is influenced by my reading of constructivism – a view of knowledge as "constructed rather than discovered" (Stake, 1995, p. 99). This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of complicated questions in epistemology. Suffice to say that I do not take myself to be aiming at the one and only 'true' and wholly objective account of some portion of reality, but to offer a representation that aims to do justice to the evidence, to the historical and social perspectives of participants and researcher (Crotty, 1998), and to recognise an ineliminable element of interpretation. In keeping with a constructivist approach, the researcher is placed at the centre of the research, both as collector and interpreter of the data.

Although qualitative research is said not to lend itself easily to evidence and methods that are 'reliable' and 'valid', these concepts do have an application to research of this kind. In the present case, every effort is made to represent information accurately and in detail, not to offer conclusions that go beyond the evidence, and to triangulate information from a range of sources (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). For example, I used information from the analyses of educational policies, curricula and syllabi to corroborate the findings obtained via the participant interviews. The value of such research lies in the rich understanding that is achieved by immersion in the 'case' that is being studied - which in this instance, refers to the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools.

My immersion in this context has its pros and cons. My familiarity with the research site and the participants necessitated a reflexive approach to the collection and interpretation of data. Apart from considering the typical ethical implications of doing research, such as participant consent, anonymity and data protection, I also had to consider my positionality as a researcher. After years of teaching in Maltese State schools, I was promoted to the role of Education Officer for Ethics. This promotion came at an important juncture in the course of this research, since it occurred just before the data collection phase. This job, as well as my previous experience and my academic background provided me with 'insider' status to my research setting (Merton, 1972; Merriam et al., 2001; Weiner-Levy & Queder 2012). This insider status helped me acquire a more authentic understanding of the research setting, as well as giving me better access to the participants. However, insider status does not come without its challenges. It necessitated a deep reflection on this positioning and how this might influence the research, in order to become aware of, and do my best to minimise any bias and lack of objectivity (Sikes, 2004, Punch, 2009, Foote & Bartell, 2011).

This chapter also considered the rationale for the choice of participants, the interviewing process and the use of thematic analysis as an analytical method. As explained earlier, the experts and policy makers were chosen for their expertise in their field, while the heads or assistant heads of school and the teachers were selected through snowball sampling. The participants were interviewed via semi-structured in-depth interviews in their natural setting, that is, in their schools or offices. Finally, I made use of thematic analysis to interpret the data according to the Braun and Clark method of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on the study, which explores the role of Maltese secondary schools in promoting the ethical use of digital technologies and new media. The findings will be presented according to the different themes, which emerged from the findings according to the sub-research questions:

Overarching research question: How do Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of digital technologies and new media?

Research Question 1: According to educators, experts and policy makers, how do unethical uses of digital technologies and new media impinge on the lives of Maltese secondary school students?

      Theme 1: The ubiquitous nature of technology and problematic internet use

      Theme 2: Identity development in digital spaces

      Theme 3: Empathy, the Online Disinhibition Effect and cyberbullying

      Theme 4: Internet harms

Research Question 2: How do Maltese secondary school policies promote digital citizenship?

      Theme 1: Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Policies

      Theme 2: School policies on tackling unethical uses of digital technologies and new media

Research Question 3: How does the Maltese secondary school curriculum promote digital citizenship?

>Theme 1: Cross-curricular and extra-curricular approaches to teaching digital citizenship

>Theme 2: The Maltese secondary school curriculum and digital citizenship

>Theme 3: The role of schools and the challenges in teaching digital citizenship

The first research question explores the participants' perceptions regarding the ethical issues that secondary school students face when going online, and how these issues impinge on their lives at school. The findings for this question are based on the participants' views about some of the unethical uses of technology and new media, such as cyberbullying, internet addiction and other potential risks and harms. Although the findings do not take the students' direct experiences into account, they provide a window onto the educators, experts and policy makers' points of view. This is important because ultimately, these are the people who write the curricula and formulate school policies which deal with such issues.

The second research question deals with secondary school policies which aim to deal with unethical uses of technology and new media, such as cyberbullying policies. It explores these school policies, as well as their perceived effectiveness, from the participants' point of view. Finally, the third research question explores the Maltese secondary school curriculum in relation to the issues mentioned above. The findings which relate to this research question will emerge from the data from the participant interviews, as well as the document review (such as the syllabi and the National Curriculum Framework).

Research Question 1: According to Educators, Experts and Policy Makers, how do Unethical Uses of Digital Technologies and New Media Impinge on the Lives of Maltese Secondary School Students?

Theme 1: The Ubiquitous Nature of Technology and Problematic Internet Use

This theme revolves around the participants' perceptions on the role that technology and new media play in the lives of their students. These perceptions are based on what the participants observe in their interactions with students. In this section, I will present findings related to the ubiquitous nature of technology, which dissolves the boundaries between online and the offline spaces (Terranova, 2004; Floridi, 2007, 2015; Jurgenson, 2012a, 2012b). I will then discuss the issue of problematic internet use, or, as it is sometimes called 'internet addiction' (Young, 1998, 2004), from the point of view of the participants.

The findings from this research show that Maltese educators (teachers and heads of schools), experts and policy makers are very much aware of the pervasive nature of digital technologies in the lives of children and youths, since all of the participants made reference to it in some way or another during the course of their interview. Ms. Garcia Imbernon, from the Office of the Commissioner for Children, summed it up as "They feel that technology is absolutely part of their lives", while Dr. Grech made reference to the ubiquity of technology when he said that "most young people now have had computers all around them from the moment they were born, so it's so pervasive in our lives and it's impacting the way we behave".

When asked about the pros and cons of digital technologies for young people, some of the participants talked about the erosion of the boundaries between the online and offline dichotomies. For example, Prof. Wain referred to digital technologies as "invasive" since they affect our leisure time, our jobs, how we communicate with each other and how we

experience life.   The Hon. Evarist Bartolo went a step further in his indictment of the role of digital technologies in our lives:

> the biggest problem I think that we have is that digital technology is taking over everything, and that virtual reality has become more important than reality, and I think we must strike a balance. Kids need to be digitally functional and literate, but they must also… we must also help them so that digital technology is part of their life, not the other way round.

He went on to say that contact with nature, playing, and talking to people in real life should still be given the priority that they deserve.

Most of the participants (19 participants) claimed that children and youths are spending too much time online. However, only two of them explained what it is that youths should be doing instead. Ms. Borg, one of the assistant heads of school, portrayed children's use of technology as stressful and alienating:

> Children are undergoing a kind of stress which we didn't have when I was young. They are being inundated with a lot of information which is sometimes superfluous, which they don't need, and for them, it distracts them from their studies, it is an alienation; when they get home, instead of picking up a book and reading it, they log on the internet straightaway, on Facebook, on their mobile, everything… I think if I were their age, I would do the same.

Many of the participants (15 participants) talked about children's dependence on digital technologies, echoing researchers who claim that in some cases, this dependence amounts to addiction (Young, 1998, 2004). Mr. Cachia used the phrase "chained to digital technology" to describe students' relationship with digital technologies, while Mr. Saliba claimed that digital devices have become almost a physical extension of children's bodies, because they are always attached to their smartphones, tablets and laptops, except when they

are at school (although he acknowledged that some schools allowed students to use their devices in schools).   Similarly, Mr. Chircop complained that people are often stuck to their smartphones, using them in restaurants and even texting while walking, describing this phenomenon as a "worrying trend". Ms. Garcia Imbernon talked about her work with Maltese students, reporting that some of these students are totally dependent on technology and consequently suffer from a lack of sleep, are distracted at school, and even "throw tantrums when you try to get them off it". She described such overuse of technology as "problematic". Ms. Borg agreed with this, saying that some of the students in her school go online as soon as they get home after school, and some of them even sleep with their mobile phones next to their pillows. Three of the teachers who were interviewed said that some students spend most of their waking hours playing online games such as Fortnite. In fact, four of the participants referred to this compulsion to use technology as an "addiction" or "obsession". One of the ICT teachers, Ms. Mangion, described a former student who was obsessed with his phone:

> In the school where I used to teach there were students who had huge issues with their mobile phone… there's a particular student that I have in mind, the mobile was literally his one friend, so if you were to take away his mobile he would be all over the place, he wouldn't know what was going on, it was like the only thing he could hang on to, he had nothing else, his mobile was all he had. These are students with huge social and personal problems, but I believe that there are students for whom the internet is their whole world, so they go home, they eat, have a shower, and then they play on the computer from the time they get home from school until the evening, especially boys… PlayStation, gaming, Fortnite.

Ms. Mangion went on to explain that some students were "obsessed" with violent video games, such as Fortnite, and spent considerable hours watching game tutorials on

platforms such as YouTube. She also talked about an instance when her students did not want to participate in an ICT lesson in the ICT lab, but instead wanted to log into the school network on the school computers to watch a video about a Fortnite update. This teacher believed that her students were addicted to gaming, suggesting that their excessive use of technology was related to the social and personal problems that they were facing.

The findings from the interviews show clearly that the participants believed that Maltese secondary school children are immersed in technology, and that the right "balance" between the online and the offline worlds is not achieved at all, but skewed towards the online. In fact, most participants (19 participants) maintained that students' use of digital devices is often excessive and unhealthy.

Many of the participants (17 participants) in this research highlighted the role of parents in helping their children make better use of technology. The importance of supervising adolescents' screen time was brought up by these participants, some of whom clearly blamed parents for the way that children and youths use technology. Dr. Grech was the harshest critic of parents, using very strong words when talking about children being brought up with technology as a substitute for care:

> because we live in a society where kids are being brought up with... you shove a phone in his face so that the kids, you know, instead of a comforter, we shove a screen in the kid's face... when they're born...

Other participants, such as Ms. Magri, explained that students are often left to their own devices at home, adding that this leaves students "exposed to everything". She said that students often admit to her that they watch online pornography at home. Mr. Zammit also expressed concern about the lack of supervision at home, adding that this sometimes "creates difficulties at school".

In fact, the topic of the parents' responsibility to monitor their children's use of technology and social media was a constantly recurring theme. However, some of the participants who disapproved of the laxness of parents, at times almost seemed to sympathise with them, highlighting the complexity of this issue. When asked about whose responsibility it is to teach children how to behave responsibly online, all of the participants talked about a shared responsibility, although some of the participants, such as Dr. Grech, were not very optimistic about parents' ability to do so, due to some perceived lack: "I think the responsibility at the moment lies more with parents, but who in turn are not very well informed or educated, if you want to use the term educated."

This sentiment was echoed by other participants, such as Prof. Wain, Ms. Farrugia, Ms. Garcia Imbernon and Mr. Gatt. Mr. Gatt referred to the digital divide between parents who have access to digital technologies and those who do not have such access. He talked about parents who do not own smartphones or even have access to the internet, but buy smartphones for their children. Mr. Catania also mentioned the digital divide, adding that some parents struggle to raise their children, and can barely manage to wash their uniforms, let alone teach them about the responsible use of technology. Ms. Mangion spoke about this issue at length. She explained that although some parents are very aware of what their children do online, sometimes even to the extent of checking their browsing history, other parents work long hours and do not have time to supervise their children's use of technology. She was particularly referring to parents who come from low socio-economic backgrounds, since they tend to work longer hours. She suggested that children who have personal problems or come from problematic family backgrounds often find solace in their digital devices because they connect with others online. She said that most of these students tend to spend most of their time on their smartphones or playing computer games, often completely unsupervised, with their parents having no clue what they are doing with their time.

Thus, the findings show a general trend of concern about Maltese students' excessive use of digital technologies and social media, echoing concerns about addictions and mental health disorders (Young, 1998, 2004; World Health Organisation, 2018). The participants tended to blame the students' parents for unsatisfactory supervision of their children's use of technology, claiming that this problematic use often led to a decrease in the students' wellbeing and some difficulties at school. This is a particularly interesting result, because it suggests that the participants had a tendency to shift the blame of excessive use of technology onto the parents. Although the findings which will be discussed in subsequent sections show that participants believed that the schools have a responsibility to teach digital citizenship, they made such an emphasis on the parents' role in supervising and controlling their children's problematic use of digital technologies that it felt like they were almost trying to absolve themselves in the process.

Theme 2: Identity Development in Digital Spaces

This second theme deals with how adolescents construct their identity in digital spaces, and how this impacts their relationships with other adolescents. The findings related to this theme revolve around issues of identity experimentation (Erikson, 1950; Turkle, 1995) and impression management (Goffman, 1959); that is, the way we present ourselves to others.

Maltese adolescents, like their peers in other countries, use social media to manage their identities and the way they portray themselves to others. In fact, as has been discussed in Chapter 2, Maltese adolescents are avid users of social media and spend a considerable portion of their free time online (Inchley et al., 2020). Eight of the participants who were interviewed for this research believed that this generation of youths place excessive importance on their appearance. Mr. Darmanin, a teacher of Media Literacy, is also a professional photographer, and is very familiar with the world of Maltese Instagram

influencers. He reported that influencers such as Sara Zerafa and Tamara Webb are very popular with Maltese teenage girls. He suggested that Maltese youths often strive to emulate social media influencers by curating their photos, often with the use of filters, which "filter out" imperfections and enhance images. Mr. Darmanin warned that the commonplace use of filters places unrealistic expectations, adding that some people seem to care more about their image on social media than the important things in life. He went on to give an example of people who go abroad on holiday and are more concerned with taking photos to upload on social media than with actually living and enjoying the experience of being on holiday. He said that in the past, people who consumed advertisements via the mass media had to learn how to deconstruct these advertisements, but nowadays, it seems that normal, everyday people are using tricks which were traditionally used by advertisers in order to enhance their personal image, or brand.

These eight participant were worried that Maltese youths are too concerned about how they portray themselves to others on the online "stage" (Goffman, 1959). For example, Ms. Magri said that social media platforms which give a lot of importance to well-curated photos, such as Instagram, are very popular with Maltese teenage girls. Ms. Magri's comments resonated with what Mr. Darmanin said about the popularity of Maltese Instagram influencers.

Dr. Grech spoke about "the spectacle of being a teenager", expressing concern about his teenage son:

> I worry about peer pressure to behave in a certain way, which wouldn't have been, you know, in my... when we were growing up there were three people who were, you know, giving you a hard time, but here you have unknown others, or unknown standards, or unknown ideal standards… think of the selfie culture, think of all this kind of stuff.

He went on to say:

I'd hate to be a teenager like my son is now, and the way he's battling it is this… you put in your headphones and you disconnect, but I have a 15-year-old niece… her behaviour is totally different, again, because of the spectacle of being a teenager.

Although he did not specify how his niece's behaviour was different from that of his son's, his use of the phrase "selfie culture" seemed to imply that his niece was more concerned about taking photos and sharing them with others than his son.

Ms. Farrugia suggested that this obsession with taking and sharing photos on social media was linked to insecurity and the need for peer support, especially in the case of female adolescents. According to Ms. Farrugia, the use of the tagging feature on Facebook has a two-fold purpose. The first is that of generating "likes", since the act of tagging friends makes the post more visible to them and increases the chances of them "liking" it. The number of likes on a post is often perceived as a gauge of how popular the post is. The second purpose is that of signifying membership in a group, and in the process, generate peer approval and support. In her opinion, girls need this validation more than boys:

I think that girls feel more insecure, and they need the approval of boys, as well as that of their female friends, more than boys; it's like boys are more relaxed about this issue. Another thing that I notice about the younger generation is that, for example, and this supports the two points I mentioned, let's say, when they post a profile pic, for example, they tag a lot of people, their whole clique, so to speak, to generate more likes and to feel safe that, "Listen, I posted this with the approval of this clique"… and it sort of provides online peer support for them.

Mr. Saliba also thought that girls are more likely to need a sense of belonging and a sense of acceptance, which they find in online spaces. However, he argued that this can sometimes backfire on them:

On the other hand, girls are more likely to go online to relieve loneliness and get a sense of belonging and a feeling of acceptance, and so it seems that, at least so far, there's a tendency for girls to suffer more psychologically when they don't find this sense of belonging and the sense of acceptance that they're looking for on the internet, and then it backfires.

Ms. Mangion reported that the girls who attend her school often use social media to post photos and surf platforms such as Instagram. She reported that these photos are often a source of conflict between students. She explained that a few months before the interview, the school administration had had to deal with a lot of fights between groups of students which originated from their inappropriate use of social media. She explained that although such fights usually include both female and male students, they often start as a reaction to something that the girls would have said or done online, often through the use of images which would have been posted on social media platforms.

However, not all participants agreed that there is a distinction between boys and girls when it comes to what they post online. For example, Mr. Gatt, who had "friended" some of his students on Facebook, thought that this is not the case:

No, I don't see a difference, I mean I am connected to some students of mine and they behave… they all frequent the same chat groups. They post similar things, they post selfies, they post pictures of their activities. I think they behave in a similar way, there isn't a distinct difference which I can pick up in terms of perception.

Mr. Spiteri stated that, contrary to expectations, males also go to great lengths to curate their photos, often using filters to enhance or "curate" their image. Mr. Spiteri believed that both social media and traditional media tend to glorify bad behaviour by giving it exposure. He said that politicians sometimes use this strategy to shore up their popularity:

If a politician's media exposure starts dwindling, he just puts a comment or a tweet, and suddenly… you know, it becomes a headline and it's a whole debate. Unfortunately, we live in a world where being seen is being heard, so if you want to win an election, just make sure you're on social media, and this is how you do it, just say something out of line to be picked up by news and be on the front page for two weeks, you know so…

Although the participants did not talk much about identity development on social media, some of them were concerned about the effect that social media and "selfie" culture has on the lives of youths. Not all the participants talked about this issue, but the eight participants who talked about it agreed that secondary school students place too much importance on their social media image, and that sometimes this had an effect on their offline relationships with peers.

Theme 3: Empathy, the Online Disinhibition Effect and Cyberbullying

This theme will explore the participants' views on the impact of digital technologies on empathy among secondary school students (Bugeja, 2005; Small & Vorgan, 2009; Konrath et al., 2011; Turkle, 2011, 2015, 2021; Twenge, 2017). The findings will refer to Suler's theory of the Online Disinhibition Effect (Suler, 2004) and will also explore the issue of cyberbullying among Maltese secondary school students.

Ten of the participants in this study showed concern about the impact of digital technologies on empathy with others. For example, the Hon. Evarist Bartolo spoke about decreased empathy in digital spaces:

We know that as we hide behind in our digital world, I can offend you online, and then I don't feel anything. Perhaps if we have a face-to-face conflict, and you upset me and I cry, or I upset you and you cry, at least I know that I'm hurting you and I try

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to listen, as a consequence, I have said something which has hurt you, and can see that you're hurt.   Online, deprived of that immediate face-to-face contact, we can become more cruel.   So that is why it's important that we learn how to have human empathy, even in this digital era.

Ms. Garcia Imbernon and Mr. Spiteri made similar comments about the loss of empathy when people communicate "behind the screen". Ms. Garcia Imbernon said:

I believe that sometimes we forget that behind the screen there is actually someone. I think it is important because when you're talking to someone you can see emotions, you can feel empathy, while obviously being behind the screen, we don't have that.

Mr. Spiteri made similar comments:

I'm sure that three quarters of the people that say certain things online wouldn't say them face-to-face, and that I think goes to show that they have learnt their values and the principles offline, but they can't easily transfer them online.

Mr. Catania was particularly worried about teenagers' use of apps which provide them with anonymity. He explained that as Education Officer of ICT, he needs to know which apps the students are using, so he has downloaded some of them on his phone:

When I hear certain things, sometimes even through my son, who is only 11 years old… they are living in a completely different world from us adults. The language that they use, the tools that they use… for example, if anyone had to see my mobile phone, my mobile is like that of a teenager, I have Snapchat installed, Instagram, and all the stuff that they use, so that at least I can try to understand them, because how can you teach students to be careful when you don't even know what their world looks like? Don't forget that the tools that we have now got used to are losing a lot of users, and younger users are not using the same applications that we are using.

He explained that he has downloaded Snapchat on his phone to find out what users of Snapchat could do anonymously, and, according to him, the answer was "worryingly everything". Although he did not specify what it is that users could do, he was concerned about the fact that younger users of such platforms often think that when they go online, "all of a sudden they get a superpower which makes them invisible".

Fourteen of the participants in this study talked about the issues that can crop up when social constraints and inhibitions are loosened.   For example, Mr. Grixti claimed that some students find it easier to insult their teachers or their peers online, rather than face-to-face. Mr. Attard, the head of a local Church school, had even more to say about this. He complained that the digital era has resulted in a total collapse of social boundaries:

> The way you speak to the teacher, the way that you might speak to your mother, the way that you might speak to your friends… there are some natural boundaries. Unfortunately, in the digital era and the digital world, these boundaries seem to disappear, and if children have got used to the lack of boundaries, they are more likely not to respect these boundaries when they come to school.

He indicated that students often insult each other online, sometimes without maliciously meaning to hurt each other. He said that it would often start with some banter, which would then escalate into a full-blown row, and often spill over into the school environment. Mr. Attard stressed that that cyberbullying is a significant concern for Maltese schools, and that schools invest a lot of energy and resources in tackling this issue. His concern was echoed by many of the other participants, especially heads of schools and teachers. It was interesting to note that all the heads or assistant heads of schools from all sectors (State, Church and Independent schools) highlighted cyberbullying as a concern. Ms. Borg said that cyberbullying is something that the school deals with continually. She explained that sometimes students fight over petty jealousies, such as when their friends

"like" their boyfriends on social media. She described an incident that had occurred just that morning. A female student had just been to her office, complaining that she was being ostracized at school after a dispute about what she had "liked" online. Ms. Borg did not provide any details about this particular incident, but she indicated that girls tend to be more subtle about their bullying, while boys tend to be more physically aggressive. This distinction between girls and boys with regards to bullying was made by other participants, some of whom claimed that girls are more likely to engage in cyberbullying than boys. For example, Mr. Zammit, an assistant head of an Independent school, said that although cyberbullying was not a major issue in his school, it was certainly a concern, and, from his experience, girls tend to start the cyberbullying, while the boys tend to get involved in the girls' disputes. This was also reiterated by Ms. Tanti and Ms. Garcia Imbernon. Ms. Tanti explained that when grading students' answers to a question about cyberbullying in an Ethics examination paper, she noticed that many more girls than boys reported being bullied online. Ms. Garcia Imbernon indicated that her work with youths has shown her that girls tend to get more personal when attacking others online, whereas boys often focus on attacking other boys' gaming performance. Mr. Attard asserted that although cyberbullying is similar to normal bullying, the boys who attend his school (Mr. Attard was a head of school of a boys-only school) tend to be more aggressive with each other when interacting online.

Ms. Garcia Imbernon, whose role at the Commissioner for Children's office brought her into contact with a lot of children and youths, claimed that cyberbullying was becoming "rampant" among Maltese secondary school children, and that many Maltese students are bullying each other through online gaming platforms. Eleven educators working in schools supported this claim. Ms. Mangion said that the number cases of cyberbullying in the school where she teaches has increased dramatically, in fact, she described them as "out of control". She explained that as a consequence, the ICT and Computing teachers had been asked by the

head of school to come up with a strategy to tackle the issue, so they decided to organise a talk about responsible online behaviour during Internet Safety Week. Mr. Galea, another ICT and Computing teacher who taught at the same school, explained that this talk had been given by a Police Inspector from the Cyberbullying Unit. He thought that this strategy had been rather effective, since the students seemed to be quite receptive during the talk, and consequently, the cases of cyberbullying in the school had decreased. When asked about the source of such cyberbullying, Mr. Galea blamed the complex romantic relationships between students, which sometimes resulted in some students harassing each other online when then relationships turned sour. He claimed that the head of school was "not very technology friendly", and often relied on the teachers to tackle this issue.

Ms. Garcia Imbernon insisted that schools have an important role to play in dealing with cyberbullying, because although such bullying starts after school, students often continue arguing at school and thus, schools should have a role in supporting victims of cyberbullying or other online harms. She iterated that for young people, the line between what happens online and what happens offline is rather blurred, and that cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying because it does not stop when students go home. Mr. Gatt also suggested that schools should get involved in cases of cyberbullying. He portrayed the school authorities as "ignorant" of the realities of students, and said that schools should engage more with social media, because, in his opinion, schools should be involved with whatever happens in the school community, even if it happens outside the physical boundaries of the school:

> Bullying is not only happening at school, now it's happening away from school, it's happening on the social media. Although bullying has happened outside of schools before, on the social media it stays public, and it could involve the school as well, because it's happening within the social media bubble of the school community, and

then they carry it back to the school, and the school is usually obliged to ask Why? What has happened? Why are you fighting? Why are you bullying each other? What's going on? And the reason why there is this ignorance of what is happening is because the school is not present enough on the social media. Sometimes you get teachers who know what's happening, but the school itself as an institution does not know.

Most of the participants who talked about cyberbullying were educators who worked in schools, or professionals whose work put them in contact with students, with only three policy makers or experts speaking about the issue. It must also be noted that most of the participants focused on the difficulties that cyberbullying cause for running a school. In fact, only three participants mentioned the negative effects of cyberbullying on the victims. These three participants were all policy makers or experts. The educators' primary concern seemed to be the challenges that cyberbullying presents for maintaining discipline in schools. On the other hand, the experts and policy makers were not as concerned about the prevalence of cyberbullying, but the three participants who mentioned it were more concerned with the negative effects that cyberbullying presents for students, rather than the disciplinary issues that it creates for schools. For example, Prof. Wain explained that digital technologies create a new dimension to bullying, making bullying easier, more accessible and more dangerous. He said that it is a big challenge for schools, but he did not know whether schools have drawn up policies to address the specific issue of cyberbullying.

Mr. Chircop, the Education Officer for Social Studies, suggested that cyberbullying can have severe negative effects on children, and talked about the cases of children and youths who died by suicide after being cyberbullied. Although he cited cases from the UK, he did not mention a very high-profile case in Malta in which a young teenager died by suicide after being cyberbullied on Ask.fm (Malta Independent, 2014a) (although he did

mention it later in a different context). On the other hand, Mr. Spiteri implied that the

negative effects of cyberbullying are often overblown. He suggested that adults often think

that children and youths are more sensitive to criticism or bullying that they actually are. He

also claimed that children and youths know that people tend to be tougher on each other when

interacting behind a screen, since they also do it themselves, therefore they automatically

downplay the consequences of what happens online, because they have become almost

immune to it. This is consistent with what Bryce and Fraser's findings, which indicate that

cyberbullying has become so common that teenagers have come to expect it in their online

interactions (Bryce & Fraser, 2013).

In conclusion, it is evident that many of the participants, especially those who have

direct contact with students, were concerned about cyberbullying, which they often struggle

to contain and deal with. Although the literature is not clear about whether online

interactions result in a loss of empathy, some of the participants maintained that their

experiences with Maltese youths have convinced them that that is the case. Since there are

no data on empathy, or the loss of it, among Maltese secondary school children (or adults, for

that matter), it is difficult to conclude that levels of empathy have decreased. Many of the

participants linked the loss of empathy to cyberbullying, and it seems that most teachers and

school leaders struggle to deal with the effects of cyberbullying because there are no clear

guidelines for schools. This suggests a policy vacuum (Moor, 1985, 2005), since the policies

which are in place did not seem to address the issue adequately.

Theme 4: Internet Harms

Sexting, Revenge Porn and Pornography.

This theme will focus on the use of digital technologies in relation to sexting, revenge

porn and online pornography. As explained earlier, there are no data on the consumption of

online pornography and the incidence of revenge porn among Maltese youths. However, there is one study which indicates that sexting is prevalent among Maltese secondary school students (Smahel et al., 2020).

The lack of data points towards a lack of awareness of such issues, and perhaps also a reluctance to speak about topics which are often considered to be taboo. In fact, when asked about unethical uses of digital technologies and new media, only six mentioned the issue of sexting. Three of these participants were teachers, (Mr. Gatt, Ms. Tanti and Ms. Farrugia) while the other three were involved in the BeSmartOnline Project (Ms. Garcia Imbernon, representative for the Commissioner for Children, Mr. Spiteri, former coordinator of the BeSmartOnline Project and Mr. Camilleri, Education Officer for PSCD). None of the policy makers or heads of school mentioned the issue. In fact, Ms. Borg, the assistant head of a State school, was not even familiar with the term 'sexting', and when asked about it, said that the school administration had never encountered it. However, Mr. Gatt, a teacher who taught Ethics and PSCD at the same school, claimed the opposite:

> In our school community, definitely one of the main problems is overexposure and oversharing that I see from students, and possibly sexting, I mean, I personally have no evidence of it, but from the rumours I hear from students, it happens.

> Ms. Farrugia, a teacher who taught in another school, said that sexting had become a serious problem in the school. She reported that her students admitted freely to sexting, adding that two years before the interview took place, a considerable number of students had started taking very intimate photos of their genitals and sending the photos to the whole school population. She suggested that the students did not seem to care about the consequences of their actions. She did not say how the school authorities had tackled this issue. However, not all educators agreed that sexting is common among Maltese youths. When asked about the prevalence of sexting, Ms. Tanti, who taught in a neighbouring school,

said that her students had not really experienced sexting. Unfortunately, it is difficult to gauge what the true picture is, since some of these findings are effectively based on second-hand information. However, what Mr. Gatt and Ms. Farrugia claimed is consistent with the available data about sexting among secondary school children. The EU Kids online survey found that 26% of 13 to 14-year-olds and 45% of 15 to 16-year-olds reported receiving sexual messages (sexts) in 2019 (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020).

Ms. Garcia Imbernon, Mr. Camilleri and Mr. Spiteri all said that based on their experiences with secondary school students, they concluded that Maltese youths frequently participate in sexting. Both Ms. Garcia Imbernon and Mr. Spiteri linked sexting to revenge porn. They were referring to instances when intimate photos are shared with others in a non-consensual manner, usually by previous partners after the breakdown of a relationship.

In spite of the recent change in the law which criminalises revenge porn, almost none of the participants made any specific reference to revenge porn in their interviews. However, three of the participants did refer to it indirectly. For example, Mr. Attard, the head of a local Church School, explained that he has come across this issue in his voluntary work as a local youth leader in the community. Although he did not give details about the case, he explained that a Maltese teenager had sent an intimate photo of his ex-girlfriend to her mother and her uncle. However, he made it clear that this teenager was not a student who attended his school. After talking about this case, he raised this concern:

> My fear is that children are always a step or two steps ahead of us. The fact that we did not grow up in their world, and maybe it takes us longer to understand certain things, might lead to harmful situations, which might be more common than we think.

Two teachers, Mr. Saliba and Mr. Galea, said that they knew of cases of revenge porn in which students were the perpetrators, however, they did not give any details about the cases. Some of the other participants (Mr. Saliba, Mr. Spiteri, Mr. Camilleri and Ms. Magri)

also mentioned the issue of students consuming online pornography, but nobody spoke about it at length, except for Mr. Saliba. He argued that youths have always been attracted to pornography, but before the age of the internet, pornography was limited to print magazines. However, with the advent of online pornography, it has become more accessible, especially for young people. Mr. Saliba claimed that the online world is full of pornography, and that many students have become addicted to it, even some who are still in primary school. He explained that he had been asked by a head of a local primary school to intervene in a case in which some young students were caught sharing pornographic links. He argued that pornography is intimately linked to the normalisation of violence:

> We know that this accessibility and prevalence is leading to the physical and psychological transformation of our children's brains, they are thinking differently, they are viewing and understanding human relationships differently, so I think that everything that has to do with online sexuality, pornography, sexting, and obviously harassment and sexual abuse is a priority… I mean, the normalisation of violence, even in the context of sexuality, usually they go hand in hand, so you can't be surprised when they get intertwined, even in real life.

Mr. Saliba also talked about child abuse through online grooming. He explained that although he had not come across any cases of child grooming in the school where he taught, his job also involved visiting other schools, and he has seen the consequences of such cases of abuse first-hand. Although he did not give details, he said that such cases are increasing among Maltese students, and that when the school authorities find out what is happening, they usually involve the police and the cyber-crime unit within the police force. Ms. Garcia Imbernon also talked at length about online grooming and sextortion. Her job at the Commissioner for Children's Office also put her in direct contact with such cases:

So they would talk to someone they don't know in a loving way because they feel that they can't maybe relate to anyone else, because common sense tells us, even young people tell us: "As if, I won't talk to a stranger... I would not give my information to a stranger", but if you're online and you're looking for... maybe even... you have certain interest and you're communicating with people you don't know, you might not even realize, but you might seek the affection of a stranger. Now in some cases, it might be that they are actually young people who end up becoming friends and then they meet and fall in love or whatever, but you might have adults who are roaming the internet specifically trying to win the trust of children to eventually abuse them, whether it's asking them for material or actually meeting them in real life. But sometimes they don't even need to, because if they ask them for photos, and they send them photos, apart from using them for their own use, they can even sell them.

Ms. Garcia Imbernon explained that children who become victims of sextortion or revenge porn need a lot of support from their parents, the school and the community at large (such as youth centres and religious community groups). She explained that they often feel a sense of shame due to having provided the compromising photos, which makes them reluctant to talk about the problem to their parents or to their teachers, fearing reprimand. Ms. Garcia Imbernon maintained that there should be some kind of school policy to tackle such cases. She said that although some educators do work on awareness and support, they often fail to collaborate with other professionals:

Sometimes we tend to work in silos, thinking that nobody else is working on it, not because we don't want to work with other people, but then we find either a repetition, or resources which are a duplication of work, so I think it's important that there is this collaborative approach.

Unfortunately, the findings from this research are not very clear on the effects of sexting, revenge porn and pornography on Maltese secondary school students. Although some of the participants reported that sexting has caused disciplinary issues in some schools, most of the participants seemed to be either oblivious to such issues, or maintained that they had not seen any evidence of them.

One of the most interesting findings in this study was the lack of awareness about sexting. Although the research indicates that sexting is prevalent, both among Maltese adolescents (Smahel et al., 2020) and their peers in the UK (Ofsted, 2021), it is clear that most of the participants who took part in this research did not perceive it to be a problem among Maltese secondary school students (although a minority of participants indicated that it is prevalent). This is concerning, because it suggests that most educators, experts and policy makers are out of touch with the lives of adolescents, which does not bode well for the way schools respond to such issues. This is also reflected in the lack of data on revenge porn and online pornography consumption among adolescents. The fact that there are no data on these issues shows that they are still considered to be taboo, and points towards a conceptual vacuum.

Online Hate Speech and Extremism.

The last theme which relates to the first research question centres on online hate speech and online extremism. Although a 2018 Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2018b) indicated that the Maltese were the most likely to encounter hate speech and some kind of terrorist material online in the EU, there are no data about the prevalence of this among Maltese youths. In fact, as in the case of sexting, revenge porn and online pornography, there was huge disparity between the participants' responses. Six of the participants were very worried about the spread of online hate speech, while the other fifteen

participants did not mention it at all. None of the participants showed any concern about online extremism among Maltese youths.

Six of the participants in this study highlighted the issue of online hate speech, which has proliferated online, especially against women, asylum seekers, refugees and third-country nationals. Mr. Gatt, one of the participants in the study, made reference to this culture of normalised hate speech:

> On a national level, I think that online hate speech is the biggest challenge, and unfortunately it is being fuelled by people of the older generation, who are not necessarily literate, they don't understand the implications of what they are saying, and it is not being enforced; unfortunately, very few people are being prosecuted for the stuff they say on the internet. It is not even borderline, it's outright hate speech, it's people celebrating the fact that someone was killed for racial reasons, racial murder. How can you celebrate that on the internet? And with impunity… no one is saying anything about it. So that kind of culture, the idea that what is said on the internet, is, within inverted commas, harmless, is something that needs challenging.

Mr. Grixti agreed that hate speech in Malta is prevalent on Maltese social media. He mentioned hate speech against racial minorities, as well as hate speech against some politicians, especially around election time.

Unfortunately, as these participants have indicated, racist hate speech is rampant on social media, often defended as 'free speech'. Mr. Darmanin made reference to this tension between freedom of speech and hate speech. He said that online hate speech has become a big problem, both at the national level and the school level, and that people often think that their right to freedom of speech trumps their duty towards others. He explained that students need to be taught that one should be responsible for what one posts online; one cannot just decide to hurt others just because they are behind a screen.

Four of the participants in this research referred to the deteriorating situation in Malta with regards to hate speech, which, according to some of the participants, is also reflected in the students' interactions with other students. Mr. Galea, one of the teachers, said that from his experience in the school, hate speech against racial minorities is more prevalent offline than online, that is, the students who attend the school where he teaches were more likely to offend each other face-to-face rather than online. However, he reported that some students have experienced other types of hate speech from other students via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat and Instagram. However, it must be noted that Mr. Galea did not seem to be too sure about the distinction between online hate speech and cyberbullying, since at times he seemed to be conflating the two.

Mr. Chircop and Ms. Mangion suggested that students need to be taught about hate speech. Ms. Mangion explained that she often dealt with students who did not seem to understand that their online interactions with others could be construed as hate speech. She said that they were not aware of the legal consequences of hate speech, or the fact that it is illegal. She explained that she often had to use local case-studies to show students that they could get into trouble for anything that they said online. She indicated that she often had to explain to the students that just like they should not insult other students in class, they should not insult others when they go online, especially in online public fora. Mr. Chircop also made reference to the consequences of bullying and hate speech and suggested that schools should teach students that they should behave responsibly, both online and offline. He said that most people would not insult someone because of their skin colour or sexual identity in the streets, so the same criteria should apply in online spaces.

Although the Hon. Barolo did not specifically mention hate speech or hate crime, he made it clear that multiculturalism has made it more difficult to "live together":

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In today's world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to live together. Our social space consists of people coming from different cultures, different religions, different realities. We have lost our comfort zone. Those who come from overseas have lost their comfort zone as well, so we need to adjust mutually to each other, to create a new… perhaps it is impossible to create a comfort zone, but to be able to live in this comfort zone, so that uncomfortably, which takes more of our energy. In a reality where there is no comfort zone, we tend to lose our temper with each other, we do not understand each other, we can resent each other, we can hate each other, so I think, learning to live together is also part of managing these differences, this diversity, because it is more difficult.

Although six of the participants seemed to be familiar with the issue of hate speech, none of them talked about extremism or the online radicalisation of youths. In fact, when asked about it, one of the participants, Ms. Borg (an assistant head of a State school), did not know what the term referred to. Although Ms. Garcia Imbernon, from the Office of the Commissioner for Children, did not bring up the subject herself, when asked specifically about cases of online radicalisation among Maltese students, she explained that there had been a couple of cases in Malta that she knew of, but the phenomenon is not as common as it is in other countries. However, she added that we need to work on inclusion and that we need to address the issue of radicalisation before it becomes a problem. She made a link between the process of radicalisation and the process of grooming. None of the other participants made any reference to online radicalisation of youths.

Just like in the case of sexting, revenge porn and pornography, the data collected from the interviews show that the participants had no idea whether Maltese secondary school students regularly encounter online hate speech, online extremism or radicalisation. Although some of the participants spoke about hate speech in a national context, there

seemed to be no particular focus on hate speech as experienced or perpetrated by Maltese adolescents. In fact, some of the participants, such as Mr. Galea, did not seem to be too sure of what can be construed as hate speech. Again, this points towards a conceptual and policy vacuum (Moor, 1985, 2005), since the lack of awareness among the participants indicates that these issues are probably not tackled through the school curriculum or school policies.

Research Question 2: How do Maltese Secondary School Policies Promote Digital Citizenship?

Theme 1: Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Policies

Although the participants were not asked directly about the use of technological devices in Maltese secondary schools, eight of the participants brought up the subject during the course of the interview. Two of the participants explained that although the official policy is that students' smartphones and personal devices are banned from Maltese schools, some schools are more flexible about this rule and allow students to use smartphones in some circumstances, when they feel that their use would enhance the teaching and learning. One of the participants, Mr. Darmanin, explained that the head of the school that he taught in had considered introducing a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy, allowing students to bring their personal devices to school. However, the teachers who worked in the school had categorically refused to support it because they were apprehensive about the fact that students could use their smartphones to take unauthorised photos of them.

Four of the participants who participated in this study argued that the use of personal devices in schools could act as a distraction to students, with Dr. Grech comparing laptop screens to a "shield" that students can use in class. These participants said that the use of digital devices in the classroom would make it harder to control what students are up to online and would probably lead to inattention to the task at hand. For example, Mr. Zammit,

an assistant head working in an Independent school, explained that when he used to teach pre-service teachers at university, he often found technological devices to be very distracting, even for students who were eighteen years old and over. This experience made him rather hesitant to introduce the use of digital devices in compulsory schooling.

Ms. Magri, who said that she likes using innovative digital technologies in the classroom, was concerned about the potential downsides to the BYOD policy. She explained that on one occasion, she had given her students permission to use their smartphones during a lesson, even though the school rules forbid the use of mobile phones at school. However, she regretted her decision to bend this rule, since the students started doing other activities on their phones and she lost control of the class. She also talked about another instance when she had allowed students to look up songs on YouTube on the Interactive Whiteboard, but after a while, they started looking up songs which were unsuitable for a school environment.

Thus, it seems clear that although some schools do allow the use of personal mobile devices in sporadic cases, there is no clear BYOD policy in Maltese secondary schools and the ban on personal devices largely remains in force.

Theme 2: School Policies on Tackling Unethical Uses of Digital Technologies and New Media

A strong theme that emerged from this research was the difficulty that Maltese secondary schools face when trying to devise and enforce policies to promote digital citizenship. One of the findings that emerged clearly from the interviews, especially from those with teachers and heads or assistant heads of schools, was that schools often struggle to deal with cyberbullying since it invariably happens after school, away from the school premises (due to the ban on personal devices in schools). Mr. Darmanin, one of the teachers, suggested that educators were "washing their hands" of cyberbullying:

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I think that in a way it's a new form of bullying that everyone seems to wash their hands of, since it's not physical, so it's like it is not related to school. Last year they used to say that there wasn't much bullying happening in school, but it seems that this year there is quite a bit, so, as I said, in a way, it's something that happens online, so since it's not happening at school, it's like everyone is washing their hands of it.

Mr. Attard, the head of a boys only Church School, stressed that that cyberbullying is a significant concern for Maltese schools, and that schools invest a lot of energy and resources in tackling this issue. Some of the participants, such as Ms. Mangion and Mr. Galea, said that they sometimes have to resort to inviting police officials from the Cyberbullying Unit to explain to students the consequences of cyberbullying.

Although the educators (teachers and heads of schools) gave different versions of how cyberbullying is tackled in their school, none of them made any reference to the anti-bullying strategy which was in place at the time of interview. It is evident that none of the schools had a clear policy on cyberbullying, so they tended to tackle instances of cyberbullying on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Galea explained that most of the time, the issue is tackled by the guidance teachers, who have a pastoral role in the school. Ms. Farrugia said that in the school where she taught, the students who are involved in cases of cyberbullying are pulled out of mainstream classes for a number of lessons, and sent to a class called a "Learning Zone", in which guidance teachers work with students in a more "holistic" manner, focusing on pastoral care rather than the curriculum:

The Learning Zone is a space which is run by guidance teachers. Students who are going through difficult times, or have particular needs, are taken out of the classroom setting for a number of lessons and are taught in the Learning Zone. The teachers work with them on anger management, challenging behaviour or time management, according to the students' needs.

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Mr. Attard, the head of a Church school, was the only head of school who talked about a more detailed policy in relation to cyberbullying or other instances of irresponsible use of social media. He said that when a case is flagged, the perpetrators or the victims are given appointments for one-to-one sessions with the school councillors or the guidance teachers. This would be followed by generic lessons about the responsible use of social media, given to the whole class via PSCD lessons, and sometimes followed by a talk to the whole school. These talks are given by the Cybercrime Unit from the Police Department, or sometimes by parents (of other students) who are judges or magistrates.

Mr. Zammit, the assistant head of the Independent School, stated that after realising that a high percentage of the school's disciplinary issues stemmed from the unethical use of social media, the Senior Leadership Team started discussing the implementation of a programme for tackling such issues. However, he did not explain what conclusions were drawn, or when the programme would be implemented. He also talked about a particular case of a student who, a week before the interview, had made unethical use of social media. Mr. Zammit explained that after he had discussed the incident with the student, they had agreed that the student would run a campaign about the better use of technology and social media by creating posters and leaflets which would be distributed during an assembly. Mr. Zammit concluded by saying that the school uses several tools to promote its fundamental values, but the staff also expect the parents to help by limiting and monitoring their children's use of social media.

Mr. Galea talked at length about the talks given by the police Cybercrime Unit at the school, which he was asked to facilitate. Although he said that these talks were effective, he expressed concern over the involvement of the police in such matters, suggesting that it would be better to involve victims of cybercrime in such talks, so that the students could empathise with someone whose life was directly affected by something that happened online.

He suggested that the students were tired of watching the same videos and listening to the same people warning them about the dangers of using social media. The Hon. Evarist Barolo concurred:

> I think as much as possible it should be pragmatic.   I think the approach should be discussing real situations in our daily lives.   I think that would be more helpful and I think it would be more relevant, rather than abstract preaching and sermonizing, or don't do this and don't do that… Listen… this has happened: What do we do in this area?   How should we behave in this area?   So it should be, as much as possible, interacting the students, not one-way messages of don't do this and don't do that, as most of the time we tend to communicate like that with children, and that is why it shouldn't be something that has to do only with digital literacy, but should be happening in different areas where we are discussing what is happening in life.   I think it's a life skill, so it should be across different areas.

The official anti-bullying policy, called *Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Schools* was published in 2014. The only mention of cyberbullying is the following:

> Cyberbullying is harassment through the use of technology and/or online media. Cyberbullying can be either overt or covert. Although most cyberbullying incidents occur within the home environment, however, the repercussions of these acts often spill over into the school context. Examples of cyberbullying include using electronic means to intimidate, harm, exclude or ruin the reputation of the target child through the use of emails and instant messaging, texting, or digital imaging sent on cell phones, web pages and weblogs (blogs), chat rooms and discussion groups. The misuse of social media leads to the breach of an individual's human rights and therefore is illegal (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, p. 12).

This policy does not indicate how schools should tackle cyberbullying, or provide any other information or guidelines with regard to cyberbullying. However, there is another document which was recently uploaded on the Department for Assessment and Learning Programmes curriculum page, which provides guidelines for dealing specifically with cyberbullying. This document is called *How to deal with Cyberbullying: Guidelines for the Senior Management Team*. It bears the logo of the BeSmartOnline consortium, but does not include a publishing date and does not have the status of an official policy. It makes reference to the *Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Schools* policy, but focuses specifically on cyberbullying, and provides teachers and senior management teams with a standard operating procedure for tackling cyberbullying. It also provides students, parents or guardians and other agencies (which are not schools) with guidelines on how to report cyberbullying. This document does not distinguish between cyberbullying which happens at school and that which happens outside of school (Ministry for Education and Employment, n.d.).

Although many of the participants had a lot to say about cyberbullying in schools, it seems that most teachers and school leaders struggle to deal with the effects of cyberbullying because there are no clear guidelines for schools, and each case is assessed on a case-by-case basis. It was interesting to note that none of the participants mentioned the anti-bullying policy or the cyberbullying guidelines which can be found on the national curriculum website.

Eighteen of the participants suggested that although schools are trying hard, they need to work harder to tackle cases of unethical uses of digital technologies and new media. Some of them suggested some ways of how this could be done. For example, Mr. Saliba suggested that when schools use the BeSmartOnline resources or participate in e-twinning projects, the material should be disseminated and used "proactively", not just stuck to a notice board. He suggested that schools should use case-studies of victims of unethical use of social media in

order to create awareness. He specifically singled out revenge porn and grooming, claiming

that these are on the rise in Malta, and that he had come across victims when he was visiting

schools, but these issues were not being addressed in schools. He also warned that there were

no clear disciplinary policies in schools over the unethical uses of technology and social

media. He proposed the introduction of such policies, which, according to him, should cover

all educators working in schools. He suggested that all educators should be responsible for

promoting digital citizenship, adding that although schools were trying hard, it is "never

enough", and schools should do their utmost to educate the students, the staff and the parents.

Ms. Farrugia concurred. She explained that the school in which she taught tackles

such issues through the curriculum, but there are no specific school policies to tackle it in a

holistic manner. She suggested that there should be a school campaign about digital

citizenship. She also suggested that the drama unit should tackle these issues. She said that

drama activities are very effective, especially since students go out of a class setting and hear

these messages from outsiders. Mr. Gatt also mentioned drama as vehicle for promoting

awareness about such issues:

> I think teaching through drama is an extremely powerful pedological tool, and I think
>
> it should be done. I mean… even in my lessons, I use film clips and I use other visual
>
> resources because storytelling seems to be an extremely powerful tool for students.   I
>
> even use case-studies, in fact, but I think we should do more in an extra-curricular
>
> manner, like I can remember a play we did last year for the school, it involved this
>
> issue… we did a modern take on Romeo and Juliet, and this modern take on Romeo
>
> and Juliet involved the social media.   The youngsters were committed through social
>
> media, you know, tweets were coming up, and gossip about Romeo and Juliet.   So it
>
> is their world, it is their language and anything which doesn't involve the use of
>
> digital technologies is basically dated and old fashioned, and students will not relate

to it. But you can use these extracurricular activities to promote ethical behaviour on digital technologies.

Mr. Gatt went on to say that teachers should themselves use social media to promote the ethical use of digital technologies, because it would be a very effective tool. Mr. Darmanin also talked about this strategy. He suggested recruiting successful Maltese influencers, such as Tamara Webb, to promote the values that schools want to get across.

In spite of the fact that all of the respondents agreed that the schools have a crucial role to play in the promoting the responsible use of digital technologies and new media, it is clear that there is currently no national strategy in place for this to take place. The four participants who were asked about the national digital education strategy (the Hon. Bartolo, Dr. Grech, Mr. Grixti and Mr. Cachia) all replied that it did not exist.

Dr. Grech explained that the most focused attempt to consider digital education was made through the lifelong learning strategy for 2014-2020. When asked about a national strategy, he said:

> "Do we have one? This is a good one… actually… because I'm not sure we have one. I mean, I wrote the lifelong learning strategy, and that's probably the most focused attempt there was to start to talk about all these things digital, so there is the component, there is the strand, so I don't know if you've read it, it's online… it starts talking about open education, and all things digital, there was an attempt at having a digital education strategy, first with a green paper, which was published I think two years, three years ago by the department for… I think it was still called... it's still called Digital Literacies… it never progressed to a strategy as such."

Both Mr. Cachia and Hon. Bartolo stated that at the time of interview, there was no such strategy in place. Mr. Grixti, the Director for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills,

confirmed that this was indeed the case, but that he, together with his team was working on such a strategy (which, to date, has not yet been published).

The findings from the interviews and from the analysis of documents, such as the anti-bullying policy which is currently in force, point to a conceptual and policy vacuum (Moor, 1985, 2005), since schools do not seem to be equipped to handle cyberbullying adequately. The findings are also clear about the fact that there are no policies to deal with other unethical uses of digital technologies and new media, such as sexting, revenge porn, online pornography, hate speech and extremism.

Research Question 3: How Does the Maltese Secondary School Curriculum Promote Digital Citizenship?

The following sections will focus on the teaching of digital citizenship in Malta (Ribble et al., 2004; Council of Europe, 2019; James et al., 2021; International Society for Technology in Education, 2021). Digital citizenship is defined by Ribble et al. as "the norms of behaviour with regard to technology use (Ribble et al., 2004, p. 7) and has been incorporated into many curricula. The Council of Europe advocates for the teaching of digital citizenship in schools, in order for students to "develop the values, attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary for every citizen to participate fully and assume their responsibilities in society (Council of Europe, 2022). This section will start with a brief overview of the Maltese curriculum, followed by a presentation of findings related to the way that the Maltese national curriculum promotes digital citizenship.

The Maltese National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and its supporting Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) are based on a number of Learning Areas, such as Languages, Mathematics and Humanities. Each learning area consists of a number of curricular subjects that are considered to be a student's core entitlement, that is, they are compulsory for all

students. In addition to these subjects, students choose a foreign language and a number of other subjects to study in secondary schools, which are referred to as 'option' subjects, such as Geography, Computing and Environmental Studies. The following table gives an overview of the different curricular subjects as set out in the Learning Outcome Framework:

SUBJECTS		LEARNING AREA
OTHER CURRICULAR ENTITLEMENT	CORE ENTITLEMENT	
• Accounting • Agribusiness • Arabic • Artisanship • Business Studies • Chinese • Computing • Construction • Design & Technology • Economics • Engineering Technology • Environmental Studies • European Studies • French • Geography • German • Graphical Communication • Hairdressing and Beauty • Health & Social Care • History • Home Economics • Hospitality • Information Technology • Italian • Life Science • Materials Science • Performing Arts • Physical Science • Retail • Russian • Spanish • Textiles and Fashion	• English • English Literature • Maltese • Maltese as a Foreign Language	LANGUAGES
	• Mathematics • Core Mathematics	MATHEMATICS
	• ICT • Core Science	SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
	• Religion • Ethics	RELIGIOUS AND ETHICS EDUCATION
	• Physical Education • Home Economics • Personal, Social and Career Development	HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION
	• Social Studies • History • Geography	HUMANITIES
	• Art • Music • Drama	VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS
	• Personal, Social and Career Development • Social Studies	EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Figure 2: Curricular Subjects in the Maltese Educational System (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2015).

Weaving across the learning areas there are also six cross-curricular themes, which are not listed in the table above. These cross-curricular themes are Literacy, Digital Literacy, Learning to Learn and Cooperative Learning, Education for Sustainable Development, Education for Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation and Education for Diversity. This

effectively means that syllabi are related to specific curricular subjects within the Learning Areas, but the cross-curricular outcomes are expected to be reached in a cross-curricular manner.

The cross-curricular theme which will be discussed in this research is that of Digital Literacy, since it is the one which is most relevant to the research questions. The following excerpt shows how the teaching of digital literacy was envisaged in 2012 when the National Curriculum Framework was published:

In digital literacy learners acquire skills in the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology for communication, work and leisure. They acquire basic skills in ICT organised around four major overlapping strands: data sources and manipulation; information communication and presentation; programmed control; and social, ethical and personal aspects. They discover and use digital data sources, and learn to organise, manipulate, interrogate and interpret data. They learn to communicate and present information using multimedia presentations; send emails and attachments; use VOIP and video-conferencing, and chat to collaborate with others. They use collaborative authoring tools and program devices to respond to input using a simplified iconic interface. They also explore social and ethical dimensions of digital technologies and learn to practice netiquette and online safety measures (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012a, p. 37).

However, the more recent Learning Outcomes Framework has expanded the digital literacy learning outcomes and provided more focus on digital citizenship. The following outcomes are the main learning outcomes which deal with ethical issues related to the use of digital technologies:

- I understand how values and points of view are included or excluded and how digital media can influence beliefs and behaviours.

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- I am aware of and abide by the principles of netiquette.

- I know what constitutes plagiarism.

- I can protect myself and others from possible online dangers (e.g. cyber bullying) by following appropriate privacy and confidentiality procedures.

- I am able to consider the social, cultural, religious and ethical implications of digital technology and can confidently communicate, share information, access and distribute content without infringing upon other peoples' intellectual property.

- I am aware of cultural diversity online.

- I can develop active strategies to discover inappropriate behaviour.

- I can create, adapt and manage one or multiple digital identities.

- I can protect my e-reputation. (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2015)

It must be noted that the cross-curricular themes consist of very broad learning outcomes, which are not associated with any particular subject or year group. However, each curricular subject has its own learning outcomes, which are more specific. These learning outcomes are supported by syllabi, which, in turn, provide assessment criteria for each learning outcome. Hence, the extent to which the digital literacy learning outcomes are reached depends on their integration into the different subject syllabi, as digital literacy is considered to be 'cross-curricular', which means that it does not have a dedicated syllabus attached to it.

Theme 1: Cross-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Approaches to Teaching Digital Citizenship

As explained above, the learning outcomes related to digital citizenship are expected to be covered in a cross-curricular manner through the broader umbrella of the digital literacy

learning outcomes. Although the Learning Outcomes Framework does not specify this, there is a Directorate within the Ministry of Education called the Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal skills which is responsible for the teaching of digital literacy in Maltese schools. Mr. Grixti, the Director, explained the role of this Directorate:

> The Directorate pushes forward the digital literacy learning outcomes, which are aligned with the DigComp, which was drawn up by the European Commission. These include knowledge, behaviour and attitudes regarding, for example, good behaviour online, effective research, good communication, collaboration, and so on. So, we try to infuse these digital skills and these digital competences across subjects in primary and secondary, and also through activities, for example, we have digital literacy weeks, we have online safety week, then there is the code week, and other activities.

He added that the Directorate sometimes organises information sessions for parents and for students. He also mentioned a number of training sessions aimed at educators, such as training sessions on SELFIE, a tool developed by the EU to assess digital skills. Mr. Grixti reported that this tool helps students and educators to "evaluate and reflect on their own digital competences", and after doing so, they have the option of approaching the Directorate for more support. He added that the Directorate reaches out to educators via different ways, such as through Continuous Professional Development courses, and through the deployment of support teachers who visit schools with the sole purpose of helping educators develop their digital literacy skills.

Although the Directorate has an important role to play in the promotion of digital literacy in schools, it is not responsible for any curricular subject. Thus, it aims to implement the digital literacy learning outcomes through a cross-curricular approach. Mr. Grixti talked about the pros and cons of this approach. He argued that this approach is useful because it combines the knowledge, skills and attitudes that the students learnt in class with the

students' day to day lives. However, he conceded that if digital literacy had to be taught through a dedicated curricular subject, one could ensure that all students are taught the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are required for them to live as digital citizens.

Mr. Camilleri, the Education Officer for PSCD, stated that the cross-curricular approach taken by the Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills has its limitations. Mr. Camilleri argued that although the cross-curricular approach might work in theory, it does not work in practice, because the digital literacy learning outcomes have to be incorporated into the learning outcomes of the different curricular subjects. This would require the cooperation of the different Educational Officers responsible for the syllabi of the various curricular subjects, since these syllabi would have to be rewritten in order to reflect the digital literacy learning outcomes. He also warned that different subject teachers might have issues with adapting to this new responsibility. He explained that digital citizenship is often assumed to be the responsibility of teachers who teach PSCD, Ethics and Social Studies, and that teachers of other subjects, such as Maths and Science are often reluctant to delve into such topics. When asked about the reasons for this, he mentioned two reasons. The first was that teachers are not usually trained to deal with such topics and would not know how to deal with issues that could arise from discussions about the unethical use of technology and social media. He claimed that the second reason is that teachers can sometimes be limited in their outlook and only want to teach topics that are related to the subject that they teach. He reported that he had faced such issues when he had developed a cross-curricular drug education programme for schools. He explained that the PSCD team had developed resources for teachers of different subjects to use in their lessons, however, when the members of the team evaluated the programme, they found that teachers had not been using these resources at all. The reason that the teachers gave for not using these resources was that they were not knowledgeable enough about drug abuse and were reluctant

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to hold such discussions in class, fearing that they would lose control of the discussion. The Hon. Evarist Bartolo also warned about the challenges of tackling topics in a cross-curricular matter, explaining that more often than not, no one takes responsibility for something unless it clearly lies within their remit.

The rest of the data on cross-curricular and extra-curricular initiatives also bear this out. When asked about such activities in their school, most of the participants seemed to be at a loss, with only a few participants mentioning some initiatives such as talks in schools given by the BeSmartOnline team or the Cybercrime Police Unit. Mr. Saliba reported that some schools had participated in a project with other schools to work on themes related to digital citizenship, while Ms. Mangion described how she uses the Computer Club during recess to promote the acquisition of digital skills and the responsible use of technology. Ms. Magri and Mr. Zammit mentioned the role of assemblies in teaching values. Mr. Zammit described the whole-school assembly and the class assembly as important tools that the school use to transmit values to students, explaining that they are often used to promote the responsible use of technology and social media. Although some of the participants mentioned the BeSmartOnline team, other participants said that they had never encountered the team members' presence in their school, and that their role was limited to producing leaflets and sending them out to schools to be distributed to students.

Theme 2: The Maltese Secondary School Curriculum and Digital Citizenship

After considering the cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities that aim to teach and promote digital citizenship, the next task is to go through all the curricular subjects which, in one way or another, deal with digital citizenship, and explore which issues are tackled and to what extent.   I will first start with the subjects which are considered to be the core entitlement of all students (statutory subjects), such as PSCD, Social Studies, ICT and

Religion/Ethics, and then move on to other optional subjects that students can choose from a vast range of subjects.

Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD)

Secondary school students are entitled to two lessons a week of PSCD, usually delivered via a double lesson. Although PSCD is assessed through the Learning Outcomes Framework, unlike all other secondary school subjects in the secondary school, it is not assessed through a nationally-set examination. The PSCD syllabus touches on a number of topics related to online behaviour. For example, in year 9, two of the learning objectives are to "enable students to understand the risk of inappropriate sharing of personal information" and to "enable students to reflect on their responsibility to protect the privacy of others when posting information about them online" (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2014a, p. 13). Teachers are expected to reach these objectives by discussing the concept of the digital footprint, and the risks of sharing inappropriate personal information online. These two objectives constitute two out of four objectives found in topic 3 of year 9, "9.3 Reflecting on One's Lifestyle Choices" (ibid.), which is one of six topics. The other two objectives deal with substance abuse and the consumption of energy drinks. Thus, since the whole topic is allocated six hours in total, it is safe to assume that the time allocated to the first two objectives, which deal with digital citizenship, is that of three hours (ibid.).

One of the six topics allocated for Year 10 is called "10.1 Establishing Relationships through Positive Collaboration" (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2014b, p.3), and it focuses on the role of technology in human relationships.   The objectives and their respective learning criteria are as follows:

Objective 1. The teacher will enable students to re-establish a positive working environment. The students will:

- talk and express themselves in front of their classmates

- revise the necessary ground rules necessary for effective group functioning

- explain the different roles in a group

Objective 2. The teacher will enable students to appreciate the good use of technology in one's life and how it can unite a community. The students will:

- describe the different types of communication differentiate and list the benefits of today's communication technology

- demonstrate how today's communication technology helps communities in general

Objective 3. The teacher will enable students to explore the similarities and differences between face to face and online communications, and how to write respectful messages. The students will:

- discuss how to show respect in social situations recognize the importance of tone in both face to face and online communication

- identify rules for writing clear and respectful e-mails, posts. messages and tweets

- demonstrate how today's communication technology helps communities in general

Objective 4. The teacher will enable students to explore the risks of sharing explicit photos online. The students will:

- discuss and understand sexting

- analyze risky forms of self disclosure and their possible consequences

- identify strategies for avoiding sexting while enhancing positive relationships.

(Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2014b, pp. 3-7)

There is a total of six hours dedicated to the above objectives, which amounts to less than two hours allocated for each objective. The suggested activities and resources for tackling these objectives include some resources provided by the BeSmartOnline team.

The year 10 syllabus also includes a topic which tackles dating relationships, abusive relationships and gender stereotypes: "Topic 10.2 Roles and Responsibilities within Relationships" (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2014b, p. 8), however, it makes no mention of the digital mediation of relationships, digital abuse, or anything related to digital technologies.

The year 11 syllabus contains one reference to issues relating to digital citizenship. One of the learning criteria in the third topic ("Topic 11.3 Establishing Healthy Relationships through Positive Behaviour"), is to "enable students to reflect on how to avoid risky online relationships" (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2014c, p. 13). This touches on online sexual harassment and grooming, explaining that students "should know that people may in fact say or do things online that they would not do in person. Students should also know that they may feel used, uncomfortable, or violated while chatting with people online". Apart from these learning criteria, the year 11 syllabus also makes reference to the consumption of pornography. Although it is not mentioned in the syllabus, it must be assumed that any references to pornography include online pornography.

Thus, after presenting the PSCD Learning Objectives which pertain to digital citizenship, I will now turn my attention to the data gathered from the participant interviews. All the participants were asked questions about the secondary school curriculum, and how it tackles the issues regarding the responsible use of digital technologies and social media. The Hon. Evarist Bartolo, Mr. Cachia, Dr. Grech, Mr. Grixti and the Heads of Schools were asked

general questions, while the Education Officers and the teachers were asked further questions related to the subjects that they are responsible for or teach. When asked about the curricular subjects which tackle these issues, the participants mentioned a number of subjects which are taught in Maltese secondary schools. Almost all the participants mentioned PSCD, while some mentioned Ethics, Media Literacy, Social Studies and ICT. Four of the participants (Mr. Saliba, Mr. Cachia, Mr. Camilleri and Mr. Zammit) mentioned Religious Education.

PSCD was the subject that the participants mentioned most often as a vehicle for teaching digital citizenship. Mr. Stephen Camilleri, an Educational Officer responsible for the teaching of PSCD in Maltese schools, explained that the secondary school syllabus includes one digital citizenship topic per year group. He explained that the year 9 syllabus tackles risky online behaviour, the year 10 syllabus tackles sexting and the year 11 syllabus tackles pornography, adding that the PSCD syllabus includes other learning outcomes which indirectly tackle online behaviour and relationships. Mr. Camilleri explained that the PSCD department, which he led, together with another Education Officer, had just produced five video clips which deal with issues related to digital citizenship, three of which are intended for the secondary school. He said that these video clips were produced in Malta, using local actors, and are meant to be used as resources which can promote discussion and critical thinking, and that all PSCD teachers would be given training in how to use these video clips. Mr. Camilleri explained that the PSCD department, as part of the BeSmartOnline consortium, has also published workbooks about internet safety and digital citizenship for the primary schools. However, when asked about a similar initiative for secondary schools, he said that there was no equivalent initiative. He explained that secondary schools use reflective workbooks that tackle the whole syllabus, including the topics outlined above.

Mr. Camilleri stressed on the importance of the collaboration with BeSmartOnline, explaining that the PSCD department has received extra funding through this EU-funded

consortium, without which some of the teacher training would not have been held. He mentioned, as an example, a seminar given to heads of schools and other stakeholders which included a presentation by Mr. Karl Hopwood, one of the UK's leading experts on internet safety for young people. Mr. Spiteri, the person who ran the BeSmartOnline team, agreed that the BeSmartOnline consortium had an important role to play in the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese schools. He explained that before the setting up of BeSmartOnline there had been no concerted effort in schools to tackle online behaviour and issues around the use of technology. Whenever such issues were dealt with, it was largely down to some individual teachers who had taken the initiative to tackle issues which were not part of the curriculum. He said that in 2009, the BeSmartOnline team had decided to tackle some aspects of digital citizenship in schools by employing a teacher to go around schools teaching such topics to the year 6 and year 7 cohort (ten and eleven-year-old students). They also trained a big number of teachers and other educators. It was only after this initiative, which had sensitised schools to these issues, that the Department of Learning and Assessment Programmes asked to be included in the BeSmartOnline consortium via the PSCD Education Officers. Mr. Spiteri stated that the PSCD syllabus is the ideal vehicle for tacking these issues, because in PSCD they are tackled in a holistic manner through the topic of relationships. He claimed that in secondary schools, digital citizenship is mainly tackled through the PSCD curriculum.

Mr. Camilleri agreed that the PSCD syllabus and methodology are uniquely placed to tackle digital citizenship. He explained that PSCD is not assessed via an examination, which implies that teachers do not necessarily have to follow the entire syllabus, but can dedicate more time to topics which they find particularly interesting. This, together with its focus on circle time and smaller classes (since classes are split in half for PSCD, with a maximum of fifteen students per class), makes PSCD very conducive to holding class discussions. He said

that PSCD has always dealt with the norms of behaviour, so extending these norms to a digital context incorporating the digital realm is a natural extension of the syllabus and the learning outcomes. Finally, he claimed that PSCD is more flexible than other subjects because the other subjects are more concerned with teaching information, rather than focusing on discussion.

Mr. Camilleri and Mr. Spiteri's comments were largely corroborated by the other participants. Mr. Saliba, who taught both PSCD and Media Literacy, explained that as a PSCD teacher, he often collaborates with the BeSmartOnline team. However, he warned that teaching digital citizenship was not sufficient, arguing that students should also be taught media literacy, which is much wider than digital citizenship. He said that in his opinion, media literacy topics are very important, but are not adequately addressed through PSCD. He also mentioned the video clips that Mr. Camilleri and Mr. Spiteri had spoken about. He explained that his students had liked the video clips so much that he was considering producing similar video clips for primary school students.

Mr. Saliba talked about the concept of experiential learning through PSCD. He explained that he teaches digital citizenship by immersing the students in a case-study, then asking them to discuss it. Mr. Gatt, a teacher who taught PSCD and Ethics, also spoke about the experiential nature of PSCD. He explained that this is how he teaches students about their digital footprint and fake news:

> So what some PSCD teachers do actually, is go on the internet and search the students on the internet, and they show them… they find their social media presence, even if they're not connected to them. So PSCD is more of an experiential experience meant to evoke emotion and sort of shock students. I think, one of the challenges for being smart online nowadays is the reliability and validity of information. One of the topics I process with students is the idea of fake news, for example. Fake news is one

of the big problems on the internet, I mean it is a double-edged sword… all of that information is a very useful tool, but that information does not necessarily mean it is correct or it is true.   Unfortunately, some students can't tell the difference between, for example, a parody website or a satirical website from a news portal.   So sometimes I show them headlines from a satirical website, and they think it is true, and then I ask them: How can we tell? And I show them how they can go to the information section of the website to see, and they will read, yes this is a satirical website, the news may be fake or is fake.

Two of the heads/assistant heads of school, Mr. Attard and Mr. Zammit, also spoke about the important role of PSCD and the BeSmartOnline team in teaching digital citizenship in secondary schools. Mr. Attard explained that the PSCD teachers in his school often liaise with the school councillors to tackle particular issues when they crop up. For example, whenever the school authorities find out that a student has posted an inappropriate comment on social media, the school councillors would talk to the student and his parents or guardians, and then the PSCD teachers would discuss the topic with the whole class during the PSCD lessons, or bring over someone from outside the school to talk about the issue with the whole student cohort.   Mr. Attard said that the school sometimes asks the BeSmartOnline team to give these talks, adding that one of the PSCD teachers used to work with BeSmartOnline before her current position as PSCD teacher, so she is uniquely placed to act a link between the school and the BeSmartOnline team. Mr. Schembri, the assistant head of an Independent school, also highlighted the important role of PSCD teachers in tackling digital citizenship. He explained that the school organises a PSCD campaign once a year, which consists of a week of activities, including talks by experienced and qualified speakers, on the responsible use of social media. He claimed that compared to other schools, the school which he worked in gives a lot of importance to the teaching of PSCD, because the school leadership team

believes that it is important for the wellbeing and safety of the students. In his roles as assistant head of school and also the person who runs the wellbeing department, he invests a lot of time in making sure that the PSCD lessons are relevant and appropriate. He also makes sure that the PSCD teachers receive ongoing and appropriate training on all kinds of issues, including digital citizenship.

Social Studies (General)

Social Studies is another statutory curricular subject which is taught in secondary school. It is referred to as Social Studies (General), since it can also be taken as an optional subject by students who want to study it more intensively. Thus, all secondary school students are entitled to one lesson a week of Social Studies (General).

The Social Studies syllabus states that it aims "to consolidate the skills and civic attitudes related with the student as a responsible citizen in a democratic society. Social Studies leads to a better understanding about social life and more efficiency in social engagement" (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2016a, p. 2). It is based on knowledge, values and skills related to a number of themes, such as citizenship, civic values, the local community, the Maltese cultural heritage, lifelong education, peace and education, Malta in the European Union, sustainable development and living in a globalised world. Although this syllabus was last revised in 2016, it makes no mention of the online dimension to the study of society. For example, when citizenship is covered in the Year 9 syllabus, only citizenship related to nation states is discussed, and there is no reference to digital citizenship. Similarly, the theme called "The Local Community" only takes into account local, physical communities, and makes no mention of online communities (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2016a, p. 5). The year 10 syllabus is also devoid of any mention of technology or new media. For example, when it talks about the economy, it makes no

mention of the digital economy. The only reference to technology and new media is found in the year 11 syllabus, which mentions "four different aspects of globalisation: economic, technological, social and cultural; making reference to global mass media as one of the positive effects of globalisation" (Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2016b, p. 6).

Mr. Chircop, the Education Officer for Social Studies, was one of the participants who agreed to participate in this study. In the interview, he stated that he was very keen on the idea of teaching digital citizenship in secondary schools, explaining that he encouraged Social Studies teachers to promote responsible behaviour, both in online and digital spaces. When asked how the Social Studies syllabus covers digital citizenship, he explained that although the syllabus does not address digital citizenship, teachers are encouraged to go beyond the syllabus and cover more current affairs in the classroom. When Mr. Chircop was asked why Social Studies is well-suited to teaching digital citizenship, he explained that since Social Studies deals with the study of society, it inherently deals with digital spaces, since they form part of today's society.

Ms. Farrugia, a teacher who taught both Social Studies and Ethics, confirmed what Mr. Chircop had said. She reported that although the Social Studies syllabus does not specifically mention cyberbullying, she does discuss it with the students when covering the topic of bullying. However, she admitted that the Social Studies syllabus does not deal with such topics adequately. She said that digital citizenship topics such as online hate speech are tackled much more comprehensively in Ethics than in Social Studies, mainly due to the lack of teaching time dedicated to Social Studies.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is also a statutory subject taken by all students in secondary schools, and is allocated one lesson a week. The syllabus had just been completely rewritten at the time of interview, in fact, it had just started being implemented in schools. The year 9 ICT syllabus deals with five topics: Operating Systems, Video Editing, Web Development, Social Media and Digital Ethics. The syllabus sets out six learning outcomes for these five topics. The learning outcome for the Social Media topic is: "I can discuss the impact of anonymous social media tools on digital crimes e.g. cyberbullying, digital blackmail, sextortion etc." (Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, 2019a, p.2), while the learning outcome for Digital Ethics is "I can ethically consider and discuss biomechanical enhancement/robotic body modification" (ibid.).

The year 10 syllabus sets out seven learning outcomes, some of which contain references to digital ethics. For example, one of the learning outcomes is "I can ethically consider the role of robots in society and the impact on the human workforce" (Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, 2019b, p.2). Other outcomes refer to issues such as the digital divide, copyright laws and the "implications of Artificial Intelligence on humanity" (ibid.). The year 11 syllabus has not yet been published, but according to Mr. Catania, the Education Officer for ICT, it focuses on digital entrepreneurship and does not discuss any ethical issues.

Mr. Catania talked extensively about how the ICT syllabus deals with issues of digital ethics in the secondary school. He said that the new ICT syllabus, or what is known as the C3 syllabus, is completely different from the previous syllabus, which had been based on the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). Mr. Catania considers the ECDL syllabus to be an outdated syllabus, since it is mainly concerned with teaching students how to use applications like web browsers, word-processing programmes and presentation programmes.

He explained that he had written the C3 syllabus after conducting research with students about their needs, and thus, he considers it to be relevant to the needs of this generation of students. He said that in year 9, the syllabus deals with the use of social media and the ethics of biomechanical enhancement, while in year 10 it deals with the issues around the digital divide, as well as robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Mr. Catania complained that since ICT is not taught in primary school, sometimes students find these topics difficult to grasp, adding that sometimes the teachers themselves would not even have thought about any of these ethical issues. He expressed considerable concern about a lack of qualified teachers, explaining that the majority of ICT teachers are teachers of other subjects who had been made redundant and subsequently asked to teach ICT. According to Mr. Catania, the main culprit for this is low teachers' salaries, which are not competitive enough to attract ICT graduates. He also criticized the lack of resources, such as books and an adequate number of personal computers in the computer labs, as well as a lack of time for training teachers. Mr. Catania also talked about other challenges that he had come across when he was developing the new syllabus. For example, when he tried to introduce a topic called "The Ethical Decisions of Enhancing Life with Technological Means" in the year 11 syllabus, he found great resistance from some Church schools due to reasons related to their religious ethos, and even the local teachers' union (the Malta Union of Teachers) got involved in the matter. Thus, he decided to not to include this topic in the syllabus.

The two ICT teachers who were interviewed stated that although they were aware of the new C3 syllabus, it had not yet been implemented in secondary schools at the time of interview, so they were still using the 'old' ECDL syllabus. Ms. Mangion, one of the ICT teachers who participated in this research, said that the ECDL syllabus tackles aspects of ICT which focus on the internet only in year 9, through a module called "Online Essentials", which deals with the use of email and the internet and includes a section on "Online

Communities", which focuses on the use of social media. She explained that she usually dedicates one ICT lesson to the use of social media, covering the different types of social media, the responsible use of social media, and the consequences of using them badly. When asked whether she thought that the curriculum covers such issues adequately, she replied that it is certainly not the case. She explained that one of the main issues is the lack of time available at her disposal. She explained that only one lesson a week is allocated to ICT, and this lesson a week is sometimes missed due to school outings or extracurricular activities. She talked about the pressures of preparing students for examinations, explaining that although her students clearly enjoy talking about social media use and often want to discuss the topic further, the race against time does not allow for an in-depth discussion. She said that tackling digital citizenship topics in ICT is very important, but felt that her conscience would not be clear if she did not give priority to covering the ECDL syllabus, since that is what the students are assessed on in their examinations. Although she was not familiar with the new syllabus, she showed hope that it would tackle such issues better than the ECDL syllabus.

Mr. Galea, the other ICT teacher, also confirmed that ICT teachers do not manage to cover much in one lesson a week. He admitted that the section about IT security, which forms part of the ECDL syllabus, is not usually tackled in class. He explained that due to time restraints, teachers usually provide students with a stack of notes and instruct students to go through them and get back to the teachers if they encounter any problems understanding the material.

Religious Knowledge

As explained in the first chapter, all Maltese secondary schools teach Religious Knowledge, or, as it is called in the National Curriculum Framework and commonly called in

schools, 'Religion'. This curricular subject focuses on the teachings of the Roman Catholic religion, and all secondary school students are entitled to two lessons a week unless they opt out, in which case the Religion lessons are substituted with lessons in Ethics. The Religious Knowledge syllabus (MATSEC, n.d.a.) does not mention the digital realm at all, not even when discussing the following learning outcomes:

- "I can explore the communities I belong to, community life, relationships and how these impact in shaping my life; receiving, challenging and being challenged, what I stand for, creating beliefs and attitudes.

- I can connect with myself, others and God while acknowledging my faith and the challenges from the contemporary world.

- I can reflect upon and discuss the values of religious freedom, respect, and acceptance of others within my context as a (Christian) citizen". (MATSEC, n.d.a, pp. 7 - 18)

The assessment criteria for these learning outcomes do not make any mention of online communities, social media or online hate speech (ibid.).

Ethics

Ethics is taken by students who opt out of Religion. It aims to teach moral values from a secular non-denominational point of view, and thus it can be taken by all students, irrespective of their faith.   Although Ethics was introduced in 2014, the Ethics syllabus has recently been tweaked to support the Learning Outcomes Framework. Since Ethics deals with moral values, there are a number of learning outcomes which focus on behaving responsibly via social media. For example, the topics in year 9 focus on "The Self and Others" (MATSEC, n.d.b, p. 7). First, the syllabus discusses the different communities that

one belongs to, such as the family, neighbourhood, school, football clubs and online communities. Then, there is a discussion of what makes good role models. In this section, the syllabus mentions traditional role models, such as Martin Luther King and Malala Yousafzai, but also discusses the role of social media in promoting role models. The assessment criteria that correspond to this topic include:

2.1d Identify positive character qualities that can be promoted through social media

2.2d Describe how role models and/or influencers emerge from social media

2.3d Discuss how following the social media influences my attitude to life.

(MATSEC, n.d.b, p. 9)

These assessment criteria are meant to promote discussion on how social media can have a positive influence on people, and the role that social media play in the emergence of role models. Teachers are also meant to tackle the role of influencers and people who seek to radicalise others online. In fact, the Ethics syllabus is the only syllabus that specifically mentions online extremism and radicalisation:

2.1e Define extremism and/or online extremism.

2.2e Describe forms of extremism that lead their supporters towards committing acts of violence.

2.3e Discuss the mechanisms of radicalisation over social media". (ibid.)

The third Ethics learning outcome focuses on self-harm and self-respect. In a discussion about addictive behaviours, it lists gaming and social media addiction among other addictions (such as gambling, alcoholism and drug dependency). It also includes assessment criteria related to hate speech. In fact, it is the only syllabus which makes a direct reference to hate speech:

3.1n Identify examples of hate speech.

3.2n Explain the dangers of hate speech.

3.3n Discuss the limits to freedom of expression. (MATSEC, n.d.b, p. 12)

The fourth and final learning outcome for the year focuses specifically on ethical online behaviour. Some of the topics that are discussed are oversharing and self-exposure on social media, the distinction between the public and the private, the ethical and unethical use of social media, revenge porn, online pornography, hate speech and cyberbullying. This means that effectively, more than a whole term is dedicated to discussions about different types of communities (including online communities), influencers as role-models and making ethical use of social media.

The year 10 and 11 syllabi focus on other topics, such as care for the self and for others, the ethics of dependency, respect in sexual relationships, environmental ethics, animal rights and life and death issues. It is only in year 11, when discussing right to life issues, that technology is mentioned again in the following assessment criteria:

8.2k Explain how bio-technological developments have contributed towards creating right to life issues in modern societies.

8.3k Discuss whether bio-technological development should be controlled to ensure there are no right to life violations. (MATSEC, n.d.b, p. 23)

Most of the participants in this research mentioned Ethics as one of the curricular subjects which deals with digital citizenship. Ms. Tanti, a teacher of Ethics, explained that digital citizenship is tackled extensively in Ethics. She reported that the main topics which she tackles in Ethics are cyberbullying, cyber safety, sexting and hate speech. Ms. Farrugia, who taught both Ethics and Social Studies, explained that she tackles digital citizenship in depth in Ethics, much more than in Social Studies. She insisted that this was mainly due to the fact that the students receive two Ethics lessons a week, but only one Social Studies lesson a week, so Ethics provides her with more time to discuss ethical issues, promoting in-depth discussion of such issues. She also said that the nature of Ethics is more conducive to

discussing ethical issues related to digital technologies. She covers topics such as cyberbullying, sexting, online pornography and online harassment. However, she said that one of the major disadvantages of teaching digital citizenship through Ethics is that it is not taken by the whole cohort of students. She said that this is unfortunate, because many students are losing out on valuable lessons.

Dr Grech also commented on this matter. He said that the fact that Ethics is presented as an alternative to Religion is a problem because the students who choose to study Religion are losing out on important 21st century skills such as critical thinking skills and media literacy. He said that if it were up to him, these skills would be part of a compulsory unit. Prof. Wain, who wrote the Ethics syllabus when Ethics was introduced in Maltese schools in 2014, said that he does not agree with the teaching of Religion in schools, since it is denominational in nature and there is no attempt in the Religion syllabus to address the needs of a multicultural and pluralistic society. He insisted that he is not happy with the fact that Ethics is presented as an alternative to Religion, since, in his opinion, all children should be taught Ethics. He explained that the Ethics syllabus reflects how people experience life, and digital technology is a dimension of people's ethical lives. He also said that in his opinion, the Ethics syllabus is good, but it is merely a starting point, since Ethics has only recently been introduced in Maltese schools. He suggested that the syllabus should be updated to reflect more recent research about how people use social media and digital technologies, adding that the ethical responsibility that accompanies the use of technology is so important that "it should run across the whole curriculum, because nowadays, technology affects practically every aspect of people's lives".

Some of the participants, such as Ms. Magri, a PSCD teacher, claimed that PSCD and Ethics often overlap in some digital citizenship topics. She explained that in a particular Independent school which she had visited, PSCD and Ethics were amalgamated into one

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subject. Mr. Gatt, who taught both PSCD and Ethics, elaborated more on this overlap between the two subjects:

> Since the ethical considerations are the same or similar, and the internet is the same thing whether it's for PSCD or Ethics, there is some kind of overlap.   It's just the way you teach it that is different.   When it comes Ethics, Ethics is more of a what ought to or ought not to be done, but the way PSCD was classically presented as a subject, even for teachers, it was through experiential learning. So what some PSCD teachers do is actually go on the internet and search the students on the internet, and they find their social media presence, even if they're not connected to them.   So PSCD is more of an experiential experience meant to evoke emotion and sort of shock students. The way I see it, Ethics is teaching digital ethics but through the rational process of ethics, of ethical reasoning, to reach the ideas of what ought to or not ought to be done.   So it is the application of ethical theory to teach the subject, so yes, the final destination is probably the same or similar, but the pathway you're taking to it is different, that is the difference between PSCD and Ethics.

He went on to say that one of the topics that he tackles is that of fake news, which, in his opinion, is one of the most significant contemporary issues for secondary school students.

Thus, after considering the four curricular subjects which form part of the core entitlement and which are more likely to cover topics related to digital citizenship, I will now turn my attention to other subjects, which are often known as 'Option' subjects. These subjects include a range of subjects, some of which are considered to be 'academic', such as Accounting, Geography, Computing and Life Science, and some of which are considered to be 'vocational', such as Hospitality, Hairdressing and Beauty, and Media Literacy Education. Secondary School students are required to choose a number of these subjects to study in addition to their core entitlement. Although there is a considerable number of subjects, I

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have chosen to focus on a few subjects which could potentially be good vehicles for teaching digital citizenship.

Media Literacy Education

Until recently, media literacy was not given the status of a stand-alone subject in Maltese State schools. Like digital literacy and digital citizenship, it was envisaged as a cross-curricular subject, mainly tackled through PSCD. However, after calls for the introduction of media literacy to be included in the curriculum (Malta Independent, 2018), it has now been included as a new vocational subject. Vocational subjects are a recent addition to the Maltese curriculum. Unlike core subjects, they are not compulsory, but can be opted for in secondary school (years 9 to 11). Vocational subjects include Agribusiness, Construction, Hairdressing and Beauty, Information Technology, Engineering Technology, Health and Social Care and Hospitality. This forms part of an educational reform called My Journey. This is what the Hon. Evarist Barolo, the former Minister of Education, who was also a participant in this study, had to say about this reform in a newspaper article:

> From September 2019, we will continue replacing the current secondary school model with personalised, relevant and quality education for all students through the My Journey reform. Alongside their compulsory core subjects, My Journey will allow secondary school students to blend relevant and quality academic, applied and vocational subjects, in a personalised and inclusive learning environment enabling them to reach their full potential (Bartolo, 2018).

The vocational subjects are based on a hands-on approach. Their assessment is different from other so-called 'academic' subjects because it is based on a series of tasks done throughout the three years of secondary schooling. Thus, the focus is very much on skills related to the production of different media.

One of the programme learning outcomes for Media Literacy, which are a set of key learning outcomes for the whole secondary school syllabus, is "At the end of the programme, I can act as a responsible digital citizen" (MATSEC, n.d.c, p. 4). This effectively means that digital citizenship lies at the heart of the Media Literacy syllabus, since it features as one of the programme learning outcomes.

Media Literacy is made up of three units, corresponding with each year of secondary school. The first unit, "The Media and Me", which is covered in year 9, focuses on photographic media. The students are expected to reach these four learning outcomes in their first year (year 9):

LO 1. Demonstrate an understanding of how the different media contexts impact media content.

LO 2. Demonstrate knowledge of how contextual factors impact the dissemination of information through media.

LO 3. Demonstrate how all factors construct the mise-en-scène and contribute to the narrative.

LO 4. Apply a range of camera techniques to produce a series of photographs. (ibid.)

Each of these learning outcomes is further split into different topics. For example, the first learning outcome covers topics such as knowledge of different media platforms, different media genres, and features affecting interpretation of media texts. It includes:

- Aspects of media platforms influencing interpretation of media texts: e.g. media languages, media content, media audiences, media organizations, personal and collective agendas, financing.

- Features affecting interpretation of media texts: e.g. interactivity, commercialism, sensationalism, news value, politicisation, mainstream, personal gratification, marketing, entertainment. (MATSEC, n.d.c, p. 13)

The second learning outcome, which considers the contextual factors impacting the dissemination of information through media, touches on some digital citizenship topics, although the syllabus does not provide much detail. The following are some examples of topics which are included in this learning outcome:

- Impacts on content by different media institutions: legal; ethical; censorship; moral.

- Aspects of media audiences: e.g. gender, education, social class, minority, race, faith, geographic location.

- Characteristics of media representation: experiential; bias; ideological; social perspective.

- How audiences are impacted by media texts: preferences (different forms of bias); beliefs; values; knowledge; attitudes. (MATSEC, n.d.c, p. 14)

The third and fourth learning outcomes are heavily based on production skills, that is, students are expected to produce a "visual story" with a series of photographs and present documentation for this visual story such as "location permits; shot list; treatment; storyboard" (MATSEC, n.d.c, pp. 15, 16). They are expected to know how to choose the right equipment to take these photographs, demonstrating effective use of camera equipment. Although in the first unit there is some attempt towards deconstructing media via the first two learning outcomes, the details are scant, and the first year (year 9) is heavily based on the production of photographic media.

The second unit, called "Communicating Me", which is covered in year 10, focuses on graphical and print media. The learning outcomes of this unit aim for a better understanding of how print media and graphics affect different audiences and for learning how to develop and design a print product for a specific audience. One of the four learning

outcomes assigned to this unit is "Know the personal and collective responsibilities when publishing online" (MATSEC, n.d.c p. 26). This learning outcome is broad in scope. Apart from cybersafety topics such as protecting passwords, backing up data and practising safe browsing, it lists the following as one of the topics: "Consequences of online activity: legal; moral; financial; psychological; physical" (ibid.). One of the assigned assessment tasks for this unit is to discuss two of the following: "Personal and collective responsibilities of publishing material on-line: personal well-being and/or civic engagement and/or activism and/or social identity and/or hate speech and/or slander and/or integrity and/or reference copyrighted material and/or posting on social media responsibly (personal information, photos, comments etc.); and/or GDPR." (ibid.).

Thus, this unit aims to help students become better digital citizens by advocating for behaving responsibly when accessing websites, posting on social media and downloading copyrighted material. It also talks about the legal, moral, financial, psychological and physical consequences of behaving irresponsibly online.

The third and final unit, covered in year 11, the final year of secondary school, is called "Creative and Collaborative Me", and focuses on film production. This unit is heavily based on film production skills, and the learning objectives are all related to film production:

At the end of the unit, I can:

LO 1. Demonstrate knowledge of aspects related to moving image production.

LO 2. Communicate an original idea for a moving image production.

LO 3. Compile the preparatory building blocks required to complete a moving image production.

LO 4. Collaboratively produce a moving image production. (MATSEC, n.d.c p. 32)

In learning outcomes 3, one of the topics refers to risk assessment: "Importance of risk assessment: e.g. to work safely, public liability, to work effectively, to protect the moral

integrity of everyone, to protect equipment, to respect the borders of use of public and private spaces." (MATSEC, n.d.c, p. 35). This topic is the only one in this unit which is related to digital citizenship.

At the time of interview, Media Literacy had not yet started being rolled out in State schools as a vocational subject, but a syllabus had been drafted and new 'labs' had been built for students to practise their photography, filming and digital skills. Mr. Saliba, a teacher who taught both PSCD and Media Literacy in Church schools and who had been involved in the writing of the syllabus, explained that the first draft of the syllabus had been drawn up in 2016. He explained that Media Literacy was already offered in some Church Schools, and that it would be rolled out in State schools in October 2020.

Since an Educational Officer for Media Literacy had not yet been appointed, Mr. Darmanin, a teacher of Media Literacy who was also involved in the writing of the syllabus, was interviewed. Mr. Darmanin claimed that the Media Literacy syllabus is on the forefront of promoting the ethical use of technology and social media. He explained that the first unit in the syllabus deals with media ethics; including, for example, the ethics of publishing photos of fatal accidents, ethics in advertising and respecting the boundaries between public and private spaces. This unit is tackled in year 9. The second unit, which is tackled in year 10, deals with the ethics of online publishing. Although Mr. Darmanin thought that the Media Literacy syllabus deals effectively with digital citizenship, he admitted that the syllabus was still quite new at the time of interview and that he was not very familiar with the details.

Mr. Saliba was more forthcoming with his comments about the Media Literacy syllabus, which is not surprising given the fact that he was already teaching it in a Church school. He explained that the first unit, which is tackled in year 9, focuses on photography, the second unit, which is tackled in year 10, focuses on web design, while the third unit, which is tackled in year 11, focuses on filmmaking. He stated that Media Literacy is very

hands-on, and that at the end of each unit, the students are required to produce a piece of work in the medium which the topic focuses on. He explained that while teaching students some basic skills in photography, web design and videography, the teachers deal with some ethical aspects in relation to media. He then proceeded to give an example of how he teaches students about privacy, consent, copyright and the consequences of the inappropriate use of social media. He added that he often tells students that if they were at the beach and happened to take a photo of someone in a bathing suit, they should not post it online without the consent of the subject in the photo, explaining that they have no right to post photos of strangers on online media, even if they mean them no harm. Mr. Saliba finds the Media Literacy syllabus to be very suitable for teaching digital citizenship.

On the other hand, Dr. Grech claimed that the Media Literacy syllabus is not fit for purpose and does not go far enough in teaching digital citizenship and critical media literacy:

> If you look at a Media Literacy exam right now… so I was asked to be an examiner on these, and I looked at them and I said, this is not how, you know, this is just ICT, this is not digital literacy, it's not talking about these soft value skills that we should have…

When asked what he thought a Media Literacy curriculum should look like, he said that he would start with a series of case studies that encouraged critical thinking. He was adamant that this was not what the Maltese educational system was doing, describing himself as the "lone voice in saying we should do that" and saying that he had given up on "that sector".

The findings show that although Mr. Saliba and Mr. Darmanin were very enthusiastic about the potential of Media Literacy to teach digital citizenship, as Dr. Grech stated, the actual syllabus leaves much to be desired.

Information Technology, Computing and Social Studies

Information Technology is another vocational subject that could potentially address issues of digital citizenship. However, the syllabus does not cater for such topics. Like Media Literacy, it is very hands on, and focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to computer systems, operating systems, networks, websites, and security systems (MATSEC, n.d.d).

Computing, which is a more academic subject aimed at students who are planning on reading for a degree in Information Technology or a related area, is mostly focused on computer applications, systems and programming (MATSEC, n.d.e). It makes no mention of any topics related to digital citizenship.

Social Studies (Option) is an optional subject offered to students who want to learn about society and its institutions in more detail. The new syllabus, which is part of the curricular reform, only mentions digital technology in the unit called "Youth, the Media and Social Change", which provides the following assessment criterion at level 3, the highest level that can be reached by students in secondary schools: "6.3e Elaborate on the role that social networking plays in youth leisure patterns today with examples on the potential benefits and risks posed by such leisure patterns and the increasing socialisation of young people in a virtually-mediated world (virtual culture)" (MATSEC, n.d.f, p. 26).

Although the syllabus mentions the mass media extensively, it makes no particular mention of digital media; however, it must be assumed that teachers and students incorporate the use of digital media in their discussions about mass media.

Mr. Chircop, the Education Officer for Social Studies, was interviewed before the publication of this syllabus. In his interview, he explained that he formed part of a group that was working on a new Social Studies Option syllabus. He said that the new syllabus would give more importance to digital citizenship topics, which would be tackled via a section on

globalisation, the aim of which is to highlight how globalisation and the virtual world are interrelated. However, he warned that although he was aiming for these changes to the syllabus, they might not be included in the final draft, because the Social Studies Option syllabus was not merely his prerogative, but the collective responsibility of a larger group of people within MATSEC, the local examinations body. The syllabus, which was subsequently published, only provides one mention of digital technologies, which is included in the assessment criterion quoted above.

Thus, the findings show that apart from Media Literacy, which makes some attempt at tackling some digital citizenship topics, the other optional subjects reviewed above do not provide any opportunity for tackling such topics.

Theme 3: The Role of Schools and the Challenges in Teaching Digital Citizenship

When asked about the role of schools in teaching students how to use technology and new media responsibly, the participants were unanimous in their claim that schools are uniquely placed to teach digital citizenship to youths. The Hon. Bartolo stated that:

It is inconceivable in this digital era not to prepare our kids for the digital world. It's not something that is going to happen in the future, it is already here, so it is important for us to make sure that, while they are learning other things, they also learn how to be relevant and to have the relevant skills, values and attitudes, because sometimes we talk too much of skills, and we don't talk about the values and attitudes for the digital era.

Mr. Cachia, the Director General, said that teaching about the ethical use of technology and social media is "critical", because of "all the challenges and ethical dilemmas that the digital world is forcing on today's children and youths". He added:

So schools are critical in that sense, in that they can give that aspect and you know, school should be a place which promotes positive values among students like solidarity, working together, friendship, teamwork, respect towards others and all those should now be infused into passing on the message that these values are also important into the digital world and the way we use digital technology.

Mr. Grixti also spoke about the values and attitudes that students must acquire to become good digital citizens. He said that it is not just about the content that students are taught, but also about the values and attitudes that are instilled in them. Two of the participants, Ms. Magri and Prof. Wain argued that educators have a "responsibility" to teach students how to behave well online, just like they teach them how to behave in their offline lives.

Mr. Gatt insisted that nowadays, one cannot separate the physical world from the online world. He said that he remembers a time when the internet was more "primitive", when social media did not exist, and the separation between the physical world and the online world was more obvious. He said that with the dissolution of the boundaries between the two worlds, being on social media can be compared to being in a public space, such as a street, adding that that just like there are rules and safety precautions that need to be adhered to on a street, there needs to be normative rules for behaviour on the internet and social media. He argued that humans have not evolved biologically and cognitively to deal with social media, therefore our culture must evolve to adapt culturally and morally to this new environment:

Therefore, there have to be rules and there has to be self-restraint, there has to be some kind of moral education which shapes the way we speak and the way we behave, the way we relate to others on the social media and on the internet, because we may have evolved to behave in a certain way in a face-to-face relationships and conversations and it comes sort of natural to us, within inverted commas, but on the

social media we may exhibit a certain other kind of behaviour which therefore needs a different kind of education, so that we can shape ourselves as citizens also of the social media.

Many of the participants agreed that students must be taught that the ethical norms and the social rules that we follow in life should also be extended to digital spaces. Mr. Chircop was adamant that students must be taught that digital spaces are not the "wild west", where people can do as they please, but an extension of our lives, and thus it is crucial that norms of behaviour are followed. Many of the participants felt that students' online behaviour is far worse than that which they exhibit at school. Ms. Garcia Imbernon blamed this dissonance on the disinhibition effect, arguing that when students interact with others on a screen they cannot see each other's emotions, which leads to a loss of empathy. She insisted that schools have an important role to play, because although students know they should treat others respectfully in online spaces, they do not always do so. She recommended that teachers should provide students with case-studies showing how to respect and empathise with others online and talk about the ethical standards of behaviour on social media. She believes that children are often too young to handle some issues that can occur in online spaces, and this is why schools need to equip them with the skills that they need to deal with such issues. Three other participants (Mr. Attard, Ms. Farrugia and Ms. Mangion) also agreed that secondary school students are sometimes too young to think about the long-term consequences of their actions. Ms. Mangion explained that the start of secondary school is usually a very turbulent time for students. Year 9 students, who are usually about 13 to 14 years old, often feel lost when starting a new school, trying to get used to a new system and making new friends. All these changes make these young people psychologically vulnerable, especially when coupled with pre-existing social problems. Ms. Mangion suggested that students often use social media as a crutch during these turbulent times in their lives.

Many of the participants talked about the role of secondary schools in teaching students about the acceptable and unacceptable ways of using technology and social media. Mr. Chircop said that one of the things that students should be taught is how to have online discussions about controversial topics, because that is something that he often finds lacking in students. Prof. Wain, who is an expert on moral education, agreed that education is key. He explained that education has always been about transmitting knowledge to children, but it has always started with the needs of students. He said that nowadays, it is impossible to educate children responsibly without being sensitive to their needs, so "educators cannot afford not to be absolutely up to date with what is happening in the world of digital technology. They cannot afford either to be uninformed about the effects of digital technology."

Some of the participants also spoke about the role of the school in educating not just the students, but also their parents. Prof. Wain and Mr. Gatt both framed this as a "responsibility" that schools have. Mr. Gatt explained that schools have a responsibility to make sure that parents are "up to speed" with contemporary digital technologies, since this would indirectly benefit the students. Mr. Saliba stressed the importance of congruence between the values that are taught in school and the values that are taught at home, explaining that the school and the parents need to transmit the same values to young people. Mr. Attard agreed with this, adding that in his role as a head of school, he often organises talks for the parents to explain the need for the responsible use of social media. Mr. Spiteri criticized some parents rather harshly, claiming that parents themselves often act unethically on social media, and act as bad role-models for their children.

Some of the participants indicated that the relentless developments in technologies make the job of educators much harder (Ms. Borg, Mr. Catania, Ms. Tanti, Mr. Saliba and Mr. Zammit). Mr. Saliba said that keeping abreast with new developments in digital spaces and digital technologies is challenging enough, but the bigger challenge lies in trying to make

predictions about what the next new thing might be. He insisted that this kind of prediction is important so that educators can educate children for the future, not just for the present. Just like Mr. Gatt, he used the street analogy to compare online spaces with the physical world. He explained that when we teach children how to cross a road and travel safely from one point to another in the physical world, we are assured that the road will not change from one day to another. However, online spaces are continually changing, so we need to teach students to be flexible. Ms. Tanti mentioned emerging technologies such as robotics and Artificial Intelligence, arguing that teachers need to keep up with the developments in such technologies and discuss ethical issues related to such technologies with students.

Some of the participants, (Ms. Borg, Mr. Catania, Mr. Zammit and Mr. Gatt) talked about the challenges that teachers and other educators face when trying to keep up with new technologies. Mr. Zammit highlighted the challenge for older teachers to keep up with current practices in digital technologies and social media, adding that some older teachers are "very reluctant" or "afraid" to keep up with social media trends. Mr. Gatt made a similar comment, labelling this behaviour as "technophobia": "I have this impression that the more technophobic parents or educators are, the less of the education students will get in the use of technology." Mr. Gatt argued that teachers should not shy away from social media, but on the contrary, they should be visible on social media to act as role models. He said that educators should make sure that they model professional and ethical behaviour on social media, such as refraining from communicating with students and their parents or legal guardians on social media. However, Mr. Spiteri claimed that educators do not always act as good role-models. He complained that many teachers need to learn how to behave more responsibly online and be mindful of what they post on social media. Although he did not give specific examples, he alluded to some educators "friending" their students online and to others who post inappropriate selfies. He argued that it was time for specific social media guidelines for

educators, with specific sanctions tied to inappropriate use, such as the loss of the teaching warrant. He framed this limited use of social media as a "sacrifice" that educators would need to make in order to be eligible to work in schools and claimed that it would confer more respect to the teaching profession.

Another issue that was highlighted by teachers was the of overlap between the different subjects. For example, Ms. Magri explained that when she covers digital citizenship topics in PSCD, her students sometimes complain that they have already covered the same topic and watched the same video in Ethics. Thus, Ms. Magri suggested that PSCD and Ethics teachers should liaise with each other to avoid overlap in the curriculum and resources used. Ms. Farrugia suggested that Social Studies could also be a good tool for teaching digital citizenship, especially since Ethics is not offered to all students. However, she said that ideally, all students would be taught Ethics. Mr. Saliba was very enthusiastic about the Media Literacy and PSCD syllabus, since, in his opinion, both dealt with digital citizenship extensively. Ms. Garcia Imbernon talked at length about a cross-curricular approach between Social Studies, PSCD and Ethics, and she said that the BeSmartOnline team was working towards a cross-curricular and extra-curricular approach. She said that she finds the hand-on approach to work better, although she didn't specify what she meant by the hands-on approach.

The findings from the interviews and the analysis of documents show that although all the participants agreed that schools should teach digital citizenship (Ribble et al., 2004), the secondary school curriculum does not do so in a consistent manner. Since digital citizenship is not a subject in its own right, it does not have its own syllabus, and thus, there is no Education Officer who is tasked with making sure that digital citizenship topics are spread out over the three years of secondary school education. Some of the subject syllabi, such as

PSCD, Ethics, Media Literacy and ICT, do tackle aspects of digital citizenship, but they do not do so in a holistic manner.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study, Recommendations for Policy Makers and Summary of the Research Study

Introduction

The purpose of this case-study was to investigate the role of Maltese secondary schools in promoting the ethical use of technology and new media. There is very little research on how Maltese youths use digital technologies, or the issues that they face when going online, and there is even less about how Maltese secondary schools are responding to such issues. In Chapter 4, I have presented the findings related to a number of themes which emerged from the three research questions. The objective of this chapter is to explore the data presented in Chapter 4 in greater depth. It begins with a discussion of the data and how these relate to, build on or fill in gaps in the literature. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research. Next, it presents a number of recommendations based on the findings, and ends with a summary of the main findings of the study.

This study sought to investigate the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools, that is, how schools promote the ethical use of technology and new media. The data were collected from interviews with experts, policy makers, heads of schools and teachers, as well as from key documents such as subject syllabi. This introductory section will highlight the key findings pertinent to each research question.

The most interesting findings related to the first research question were the participants' views regarding students' excessive use of digital technologies. Many of the participants accused the students' parents of giving their children unfettered access to digital technologies. Many of them were also concerned about the way that students use social media to portray heavily curated images of themselves in a quest for popularity. Most of the

participants, especially those who worked directly with students in schools, were very concerned about cyberbullying, but felt that schools are often unable to successfully deal with cases of cyberbullying, since the bullying does not happen on school grounds. Many of the educators complained that schools often have to deal with the fallout from cases of cyberbullying, which are on the increase. Some educators were also concerned about students who sexted others, although the majority of participants did not seem to think that sexting was an issue. A few of the participants were concerned about online pornography, revenge porn and hate speech, but none of the participants were concerned about extremism or radicalisation; in fact, this was something that did not feature at all in the discussions around the use of social media by Maltese secondary school students.

The second research question focused on the role of secondary school policies in promoting the ethical use of digital technologies. The most significant finding that emerged from the data was that although all the participants agreed that schools have a responsibility to teach digital citizenship, there is no national strategy on digital education. Furthermore, explicit school policies on dealing with cyberbullying, sexting, extremism and other unethical behaviours are also non-existent. The findings show that in the absence of such policies, teachers and heads of schools often struggle to deal with such issues, and often take ad-hoc decisions to contain such behaviour.

The third and final research question investigated how the Maltese secondary school curriculum promotes digital citizenship. The main finding was that the subjects which deal with digital citizenship are Ethics, PSCD, ICT and Media Literacy. Out of these four subjects, only PSCD and ICT are offered to the whole student cohort, since Media Literacy is a vocational subject which is only chosen by a small number of students, and Ethics is only taken by some students in lieu of Religion. However, the coverage of digital citizenship topics via these four subject is patchy at best. Ethics is the subject which covers issues such

as cyberbullying, sexting, revenge pornography, pornography, hate speech and radicalisation best; however, one major shortcoming is that these issues are only covered in year 9. Another interesting finding highlighted the challenges that the fast pace of technological development poses for educators, who sometimes struggle with keeping up to date with such developments.

After presenting the highlights from each research question, I will now proceed to discuss the findings into more detail. They will be presented in themes, which follow the same order as the themes in Chapter 4.

Research Question 1: According to Educators, Experts and Policy Makers, how do Unethical Uses of Digital technologies and New Media Impinge on the Lives of Maltese Secondary School Students?

Theme 1: The Ubiquitous Nature of Technology and Problematic Internet Use

Luciano Floridi coined the term "onlife" to refer to the blurring between the online and the offline world and the blurring of the distinctions between humans, machines and nature (Floridi, 2007, p. 62). He argues that nowadays, due to the ubiquitous nature of technology, we can no longer distinguish between what is online and what is offline, and that technologies and new media affect who we are, how we socialise, our conceptions of reality and our agency. Floridi's arguments are very similar to those made earlier by Terranova (2004) and Jurgenson (2012a, 2012b), both of whom contended that our online and offline interactions often blend seamlessly into each other.

The findings which emerged from the participant interviews highlight the way that technology has permeated almost every aspect of our lives. All of the participants agreed that digital technologies have become pervasive in the lives of youths. One of the participants,

Mr. Saliba, claimed that children and youths are so attached to their smartphones, tablets and laptops that these devices become almost a "physical extension" of their bodies. The way he described it is reminiscent of the way that Floridi (2015) describes the blurring of the distinction between physical bodies and machines. Although none of the participants mentioned the term "hyperconnectivity", the way that they described how children and youths use digital devices is similar to the way Floridi (2015) describes it in *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*. Thus, the findings from this study suggest that Maltese children and youths are hyperconnected in the same way that is described by Floridi, Terranova and Jurgenson.

The participants' comments indicate that they have a rather negative opinion of such hyperconnectivity. In fact, the participant who was most emphatic about this was the Hon. Evarist Bartolo, who talked about digital technologies "taking over" normal life. He was particularly apprehensive about Virtual Reality, claiming that "Virtual Reality has become more important than reality", and insisted that contact with nature, play, talking with human beings and doing "real things", rather than "virtual things" are still important. The Hon. Bartolo's comments seemed to imply that playing and talking to human beings via online platforms do not count as "reality". This dualism between the "real" and the "virtual" is rejected by Jurgenson, who uses the term "augmented reality" to describe the "enmeshing of the on and offline" (Jurgenson, 2012a, p. 84). The Minister's comment was echoed by most of the participants, who insisted that adolescents should find a "balance" between the online and the offline dimensions, but did not articulate what it was about the online world that was so fundamentally different from the offline world. These comments suggest a dissonance between the participants' perceptions of the online/offline worlds and the reality that adolescents are experiencing. This dissonance is problematic on two counts. Firstly, experts and policy makers are the ones who write policies and educational curricula, so it is important

for their perceptions to be in line with that of adolescents, otherwise there is a risk of a conceptual vacuum, often followed by a policy vacuum (Moor, 1985). As explained earlier, a conceptual vacuum happens when there is a collective lack of understanding of new technologies, while a policy vacuum is when the existing policies are either missing or inadequate (ibid.). Secondly, educators, who enforce policies and teach according to the curricula, must also be conversant with the discourse and reality of their students, otherwise their teaching risks becoming outdated and irrelevant.

Ms. Borg's observation about the kind of "stress" and "alienation" that students feel as a result of an abundance of information and ubiquitous connectivity encapsulates the gist of most of the participants' thoughts on the matter. This sentiment was echoed by most of the participants (19 participants), some of whom (5 participants) compared their relatively technology-free childhood to the way that today's children are raised with technology, with more than a hint of nostalgia, and at times, even a bit of moral panic about the use of technological devices by children and youths.

The excessive use of digital technologies concerns some researchers, who claim that it can point towards addiction (Young, 1998, 2004). Although not all mental health experts agree that excessive internet use can be classified as a mental health disorder, the World Health Organization added Gaming Disorder to its list of mental health conditions in 2018 (World Health Organization, 2018). One of the findings that emerged from the data resulting from the participant interviews is that many of the participants (15 participants) were concerned about internet and gaming addictions among secondary school children. This finding supports other research about Maltese adolescents' use of the internet and digital media. Recent research places Maltese adolescents at the top for problematic internet use (Inchley et al., 2020) and second highest in the EU for the use of digital media (Smahel et al., 2020).

Although the data related to addictions are not conclusive in the research literature regarding problematic internet use in Maltese adolescents, it is clear that Maltese secondary school students spend more time online than most of their peers. Thus, the issue of addiction cannot be dismissed. It is important to note that all of the data that are available on the use of technology are based on data which were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is probably safe to assume that the number of youths who were at risk of internet or gaming addictions has increased. This hypothesis is based on the fact that for many months, youths were effectively locked inside their homes, and any form of face-to-face interaction was highly discouraged. The pandemic, school closures and frequent lockdowns have had a toll on the mental health of children and have probably heightened the tendency for addictions. For most youths, online games and social media provided the only space in which to "hang out" with their peers and to beat the boredom. Although in most cases it was a welcome respite and an invaluable resource for connecting with others, there are some inherent risks to these online spaces. For example, social media and online games often contain targeted adverts or 'loot boxes' which provide users with an experience which is very much like gambling (Zendle & Cairns, 2018; Zendle et al.; 2020; Etchells, 2019). It is interesting to note that none of the participants who talked about students' addictions and excessive use of technology and new media articulated in detail what it was exactly that students did when they were online. For example, although some of the participants were concerned that some of the students were addicted to gaming and social media, they did not talk about loot boxes or targeted advertising. In fact, save for three or four participants, their understanding of gaming and social media platforms seemed to be rather limited. This is problematic because policy makers, experts and educators need to understand what students do when they go online in order to devise effective school curricula and policies and avoid basing them on a 'moral panic', or on outdated practices.

One of the challenges that is posed by hyperconnectivity is the difficulty in opting out of the 'online world', since the online and the offline are completely intertwined and adolescents have become "digital by default" (Stoilova et al., 2020, p. 198).   Thus, for example, teenagers often need internet access to browse and buy music, to read emails from their teachers, to buy tickets for face-to-face events, and to contact their friends. As danah boyd (2014) notes, teenagers' lives are complicated by the fact that they have less freedom to wander about and meet friends face-to-face, so they often resort to online communication to have a thriving social life.   In fact, this hyperconnectivity allows them to blend their face-to - face interactions with those that happen online. Thus, it is not surprising that youths use digital technologies. Ms. Borg, one of the participants, confessed that if she had been an adolescent, she would probably have been just as connected as the students in her school are.

One of the reasons for this constant connectivity is that the availability of content, such as games and streamed videos, makes it difficult for youths to 'tune out'.   Online gaming and social media platforms are particularly 'addictive', as they meet Davenport and Beck's (2001) four factors for successful user engagement: relevance, engagement, community and convenience. It is very evident that youths find such platforms relevant to their way of life, in fact, it is often the case that their interests revolve around gaming platforms and social media. Such platforms also increase their relevance to young people via targeted content based on demographic data, past viewing histories and on what they and their friends had 'liked' in the past. Social media and online games reward engagement via increased visibility and in-game status. They also provide a clear sense of community, since 'friends' or fellow gamers can organise themselves into groups, comment on each other's posts, play together and engage in a multitude of ways. Finally, they are very convenient, because all that they require is a digital device and a WiFi or mobile data connection, which,

in a country like Malta, with a very high internet penetration rate (Lauri et al., 2015), is not usually a stumbling block.

The data from the literature show clearly that Maltese youths use the internet more than their peers in other countries. Although an adverse link between health and wellbeing and internet use has not been established, the fact that Maltese secondary school children use the internet more than their peers is of concern and should be investigated. One of the reasons could be because that they have no access to digital devices when they are at school, so the line between the 'offline' world (school) and the 'online/offline' world is more clearly demarcated, and they might be more eager to get back to their digital devices as soon as they arrive home.

Another possible reason could be that the culture of socialising with others is key to Maltese culture. Malta is a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean, which becomes unbearably hot for around five months of the year. It is densely populated and has become rather urbanised. Traditionally, families used to live in tightly knit communities with strong ties to their extended family and neighbours, most of whom lived within walking distance to each other, and all of whom lived within driving distance, since the island is only 27km long and 14.5 km wide, with a total area of 246 square kilometres.

Until around twenty years ago, when most buildings did not have air-conditioning installed, Maltese families used to have a siesta in the afternoon, and then congregate outside their houses and on the beaches in the late afternoon. The high temperatures and high levels of humidity make summer afternoons unbearably hot, making it almost impossible to get any work done. In fact, summer school holidays last from the beginning of July until the end of September and until a few years ago, most employees only worked half days in summer.

Thus, Maltese culture is traditionally based on a lifestyle in which families and friends spend a lot of time together outdoors. However, all this has changed from the early 2000s

onwards. As Malta progressed and the Maltese lifestyle began to resemble that of other

European countries, Maltese families started spending more time indoors, and children

started having less contact with each other than they used to have before. This happened for

a number of reasons. As more households got air-conditioning installed, Maltese families did

not need to spend time outside in the late afternoons and evenings to escape the heat.

Furthermore, the close-knit communities that characterised many Maltese villages have all

but disappeared, along with the sense of safety that such communities provided its members.

Letting children and young teenagers just hang around together, unsupervised by adults, is

nowadays highly frowned upon, since streets are not considered to be safe places and the

threat of danger is always at the back of parents' minds. This threat of danger is compounded

by urbanisation and high levels of car use in towns and villages.

Of course, this is not particular to Malta. As boyd (2014) explains, this current

generation of teenagers are not free to wander around free from adult supervision like those

of previous generations. Just like Maltese parents, American parents have a heightened

awareness of risk, and do not permit their children to just wander off. Consequently,

children's opportunities for face-to-face socialising are limited and understandably, they

make up for this shortfall via online communication. According to boyd, social media

provides "opportunities for house-bound teens to socialize and people-watch" (boyd, 2014 p.

91). Children who have been brought up in a culture of socialising but have limited

opportunities for doing so physically are turning to social media in droves, just like the rest of

the population, which has the third highest social media use in the EU (European

Commission, 2021).   The Maltese, whose culture was, by necessity, social and rather insular,

and quite prone to gossip, often stay in touch with their extended circles of friends and

families via social media. This propensity for gossip, or keeping up to speed with what the

members of your community are up to, could point to a possible explanation for the popularity of social media platforms in Malta.

Another reason why Maltese youths spend so much time on digital devices at home is quite likely their sheer convenience (Davenport & Beck, 2001). It is a relatively cheap form of entertainment and does not require any complex planning or supervision. Unfortunately, the amount of time that Maltese youths spend online seems to be replacing other activities, such as sporting activities. This is backed by data on obesity and physical activity, showing that Maltese children are not very physically active (Fenech et al., 2020; Inchley at al., 2020). This is not because of lack of time to engage in sports activities. Most schools finish at around 14:00 or 14:30, but do not offer extra-curricular sports activities. Parents who wish to enrol in sports activities must often pay a lot of money to pay for privately-run classes or clubs (although the state does offer some heavily subsided classes in various sports). The cost of such classes, coupled with the fact that children often have to be ferried from one activity to another by their parents, often makes it difficult for children from low-income households to participate in such activities.

There is also a difference in culture between Maltese children and their EU counterparts. Traditionally, sports activities have not been given much importance and children tended not to be very much involved in organised sports activities. Fenech et al. (2020) report that Maltese children prefer sedentary activities and only participate in physical activity once a week or less. They suggest that this is due to three main reasons; schoolwork pressure, the rapid urbanisation of Maltese villages with ever-decreasing safe space for children to play in, and the fast pace of life experience by many Maltese families, especially when both parents work outside the home (Fenech et al., 2020).

There is also evidence that points towards an indication that Maltese teenagers' excessive use of digital technologies is displacing important activities such as reading for

pleasure. They PISA 2018 reading scores rank among the lowest in the EU, while their

technology use during their free time ranks as the second highest (OECD, 2019). The

reasons for this are not clear. One of the reasons could be the relatively high cost of books

when compared to the average wage. Since Malta is an island in the middle of the

Mediterranean, all imports cost more than they would in mainland Europe, and the small size

of the market makes the publication or the importation of books in large quantities untenable.

In fact, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Maltese publishing industry had already been in

crisis and the pandemic led many publishers to shut down (Mallia, 2020). Another reason

could be a lack of interest in reading books for pleasure.

The data referred to above supports the premise that Maltese adolescents spend a lot

of their free time at home on their digital devices. Although the participants who were

interviewed for my research did not refer to any of these data, they constantly reiterated that

secondary school students spend too much time online at the expense of everything else.

However, it is interesting to note that none of the participants talked about any policies that

the state can enact to encourage children to lead a more balanced life. Although there is a lot

of talk about work-life balance for adults in employment, there is not much discussion going

on about children's excessive use of technology. It seemed that most of the participants

blamed parents for their role in their children's use of technology, or rather, their 'absent'

role. They often talked about parents who literally leave their teenagers to their own devices,

leaving them unsupervised for long periods of time while they go about their lives.

Seven of the participants who were interviewed during the course of this research

talked about the 'digital divide' between parents who had the means to supervise and support

their children in how they use technology, and those who do not. Two of the participants

(Mr. Catania and Ms. Mangion) explained that some parents find it difficult to give basic care

to their children, let alone support them with their use of technology. The term 'digital

divide' usually refers to the gap between those who have access to the internet and digital technologies and those who do not. Although the concept of the digital divide is not as relevant to Malta, since less than 2% of children do not have access to the internet (Lauri et al., 2015), it is clear that there are other gaps between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Some of the participants explained that although children who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds might have access to the internet via smartphones and tablets, they often fail to get the best use from such technologies, often limiting themselves to passive consumption of media content, messaging their friends, using social media platforms and playing games. Ms. Garcia Imbernon showed concern about the fact that Maltese children and youths often lag behind their counterparts when it comes to creating innovative content. Thus, one might suggest that there is also another gap, which is the gap between parents who support their children in using technology positively, and parents who literally leave children to their own devices.

This finding highlights the many social inequalities in Maltese society. The increasingly digitalised and connected world that we are living in excludes people who do not have the necessary skills to look up information or access services, which are often only offered via apps, social media and email. For example, Maltese schools have recently implemented an online system called MySchool through which parents can access their children's school results, absences from school and notices sent by the school. Thus, parents who have no internet access or who lack the skills to be able to make use of such a system are effectively missing out on crucial information about their children's education.

However, it is not just parents who are on the lower socio-economic rung of the ladder that are struggling with supporting their children. Parents need to have the time and energy to be present in their children's lives and have the skills to teach them about how to interact ethically with others online, and to supervise and monitor their children's online

interactions and help them deal with issues if or when they crop up. Thus, it is not merely families who are at risk of poverty that are struggling. As Mr. Zammit indicated, even parents who can afford to send their children to expensive private schools often struggle to keep up with what their children are doing online and to support them when they encounter problems. The EU Kids Online Survey showed clearly that many Maltese children do not seek their parents' help when they encounter problems online (Smahel et al., 2020). Although in some cases this could be due to parents' lack of digital literacy, some of the participants who were interviewed for my study indicated that some parents are so overwhelmed with work and family life that they do not have the time to be there for their children. Two of the participants (Mr. Attard and Mr. Camilleri) explained that although they do sometimes organise informative talks for parents in schools, very few parents attend these talks. This must not be construed as blaming parents for not caring about their children's wellbeing, it is merely describing the current situation in Malta. Soaring living costs have made it necessary for some parents to work long hours, often at the detriment of their wellbeing and their family life.

The interview data show that the participants, who were all educators in some way or another (the experts and policy makers have all been involved in teaching and/or education at some point in their lives), were rather harsh on parents and tended to overstate their role in mediating their children's use of digital technologies and social media. They seemed to shift the burden of responsibility onto parents, who are not always adept at supporting their children in making the best use of technology.

The way that the participants described parents pointed towards a 'deficit mentality' which is a form of pathologizing practice described by Portelli as a "mentality rejects all that is considered as being not "normal" when compared to the values and qualities of the dominant" (Portelli, 2013, p. 213). Deficit thinking is problematic because it often stems

from misinformation and misconstruction, leading to marginalisation and prejudice (ibid.). The participants spoke of both the parents and the students in deficit terms, blaming both of them for excessive screen time use. In fact, the odds are stacked against parents and caregivers, since the whole of society now revolves around online media and digital technologies, and it is very difficult to prise children and youths away from their devices, especially when these devices and the platforms that they enable are designed to capture their attention for as long as possible (Davenport & Beck, 2001). One cannot deny that youths have become "digital by default" (Stoilova, et al., 2020, p. 198); that is, smartphones, tablets and laptops have become essential to their lives, not just for entertainment purposes, but for access to education, information, goods and services. Thus, it is easy to blame youths for excessive screen time use, or their parents for allowing it, while exonerating the rest of society. I think that we should strive to avoid this deficit mentality and rather than blaming parents or youths, we should focus on the role of education in teaching young people how to make better use of digital technologies. As two of the participants (Mr. Chircop and the Hon. Bartolo) exclaimed, "It takes a village to raise a child".

Theme 2: Identity Development in Digital Spaces

The second theme deals with adolescents' identity development in digital spaces, as well as the impact this has on their peer relationships. According to established theories of psychosocial development, secondary school students, who are usually between the ages of 13 and 16, are in the stage which focuses on developing a sense of self and identity (Erikson, 1950). During this stage, adolescents seek to establish a sense of self, and in the process, they often experiment with different roles and behaviours. These 'experiments' are rejected or internalised according to the feedback that they receive from others. Thus, their sense of self develops through social interaction with others, and their concepts of self and identity

constantly change according to the new experiences and the information that they receive from society. According to Erikson, this stage is important to the process of developing a strong sense of identity, since adolescents who are not allowed to explore and experiment will remain insecure and confused about their identity.

Although such experimentation is developmentally appropriate, it often worries and perplexes adults, and can sometimes get adolescents into trouble. In fact, throughout the ages, teenagers have been often been labelled as troublesome or difficult. They experiment with strange hairstyles, clothes, sexual norms, political views and so on. However, what is peculiar to this generation of teenagers is that since their interactions with others often happen in digital spaces, the way that they behave is often visible to a wider audience. Parents, teachers and the wider society are granted a window into their online interactions with others, and what starts off as a normal expression of identity exploration can have serious consequences when there is context collapse, that is, when behaviour that is meant for one context is witnessed by users in other contexts (boyd, 2014).

Experimenting with different parts of their identity gives young people valuable feedback about what other people approve of or disapprove of. Turkle described such "identity play" as "fluid, emergent, decentralized, multiplicitous, flexible, and ever in process" (Turkle, 1995, pp. 263-264). Thus, adolescents, who are going through their Identity vs Role Confusion stage (Erikson, 1950), try out different hobbies, interests, and looks. They often place a lot of importance on their physical appearance, often going to great lengths to portray themselves in a positive light, and they often use social media as a stage. This resonates with Goffman's phrase "impression management", which he coined in 1959, and which refers to the way we adjust how we present ourselves in public in order to obtain the approval of others. In fact, Goffman refers to this presentation of the self as a series of "everyday performances" (Goffman, 1959). The way that adolescents portray themselves to

others on social media often seems like a performance. They experiment with clothes, hairstyles, make-up and backgrounds which enhance their attractiveness, and engage in activities which can make them more socially desirable. They even use specific digital technologies to digitally alter their images. According to a recent report, 48% of girls and young women in the UK use apps and filters on their photos to make themselves look better, and 34% of them avoid posting a photo of themselves on social media unless they have changed aspects of their appearance (Girlguiding, 2020). Indeed, social media is particularly suited for gauging others' feedback and reactions. 'Likes', followers and comments are often used by young people as a measure of one's worth or attractiveness.

According to the participants in this study, Maltese adolescents also use social media for impression management. Eight participants showed concern about the amount of time and effort that Maltese secondary students spend on curating their social media profiles. Mr. Darmanin, who taught Media Literacy, spoke about the frequent use of digital filters by ordinary people (such as teenage students). The aim of these filters is to filter out imperfections in photos. He also spoke about people being more concerned about posting photos of their holidays on social media platforms than actually enjoying those experiences, often using social media to give the impression that their lives are better than they actually are. This comment is consistent with what Gardner and Davis (2014) found when conducting research with adolescents and educators in the US. Molly, one of the participants in their study, found the endless stream of her peers' "perfect lives" on her Facebook newsfeed to be exhausting and alienating. She told the researchers: "On Facebook, people are more concerned with making it look like they're living rather than actually living" (Gardner & Davis, 2014, p. 63).

The phenomenon that Mr. Darmanin and Gardner and Davis referred to corresponds with Goffman's theory of presentation of the self as a performance. Modern technologies,

such as social media, digital cameras and apps which digitally enhance photos, have allowed ordinary people to present a well-curated self, which is a kind of 'performance' for the public, or what is often called 'personal branding'. The aim of personal branding is to increase social status and in turn, improve relationship and work prospects. Gardner and Davis (2014) call this personal branding exercise "the packaged self", arguing that adolescent social media users often regard themselves as objects of value to others. Gardner & Davis posit that the different apps on adolescents' smartphones capitalise on the individualism and self-focus that adolescents exhibit by allowing them to package themselves for others, that is, take photos and videos, edit them and share them with others. The apps also provide a measurable way of quantifying online influence by measuring "likes", "friends" or "influence scores" (ibid.).

The participants' responses indicate that they were apprehensive about how Maltese youths present themselves online. To a certain extent, this is a normal phase in the lives of teenagers. Teenagers have always strived to give a good impression of themselves and gain their peers' approval. However, the participants' concern was that digital technologies enable practices which are detrimental to students' wellbeing. Some of the participants believe that this 'performance' aspect of their students' online interactions is causing unnecessary anxiety and pressure to conform to beauty ideals. As Dr. Grech suggested, the current generation of students are living "the spectacle of being a teenager". When Gardner and Davis (2014) wrote about "the packaged self", they made a distinction between adolescents coming from higher-income families, who made efforts to "market" themselves to potential employers and college admission officers, and adolescents coming from lower-income families, who focused more on emulating celebrities. The participants' responses did not show any evidence of the former. On the other hand, eight participants agreed that Maltese youths place a lot of emphasis on their appearances on social media. Their responses indicate that they believe

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that Maltese youths, especially girls, tend to view themselves as a 'sexual product' through the lens of social media, and the natural tendency of wanting to be liked and accepted by others manifests itself in the quest for virtual 'likes'. Four participants suggested that social media provides teenagers with social validation, as well as a sense of belonging and acceptance. Two of these participants indicated that girls are more often inclined to crave this validation. However, not all the participants agreed with this statement, indeed, the other two participants thought that male and female students exhibit the same kind of behaviours on social media platforms. Although the need for acceptance and validation is a very real need, social media can act as a toxic enabler of comparing oneself to others, often creating unhealthy competition with others and a sense of inferiority. The constant stream of 'perfect' lives and 'perfect' bodies can make youths dissatisfied with their own and give rise to feelings of inadequacy. The frequent use of filters which enhance physical beauty might change the way they form their identities and represent themselves online. Young people, who are still in the process of forming their identities, have to navigate between their digital self and the way they look and represent themselves in offline contexts. Since this is a relatively new phenomenon, we do not know how this will affect them in the longer term.

Although this study does shed some light on how Maltese students present themselves online, it was not the objective of the research. Since the findings emerge through the lens of policy makers, experts and educators, not from the students themselves, they cannot be relied on to give a true picture of how Maltese students navigate their identity online. The only conclusions that can be drawn from this data are confined to the participants' views about the topic. As explained earlier, doing research with Maltese children on controversial topics is rather difficult, so there are no data on how Maltese adolescents present themselves online. This risks denying them a voice. Thus, there is a dire need for more research into the topic. Such research would yield valuable data which can guide policy makers and educators to

provide better support to youths. We need to understand why Maltese youths are heavy users

of social media, and how this is affecting their day-to-day lives. The literature shows clearly

that Maltese youths spend most of their free time on social media, immersed in a world which

encourages the endless pursuit for popularity, often through idealised images of wealth and

beauty, and this study shows that policy makers, experts and educators are aware of this.

Theme 3: Empathy, the Online Disinhibition Effect and Cyberbullying

The third theme deals with the impact of digital technologies on the way that

secondary school students treat others online. Various researchers (Bugeja, 2005; Small &

Vorgan, 2009; Konrath et al., 2011; Turkle, 2011, 2015, 2021; Twenge, 2017) contend that

the frequent use of technology is displacing face-to-face conversations with others, which in

turn, might lead to a loss of empathy for others. Turkle (2015) argues that the more time we

spend looking at screens instead of faces, the less we engage in making conversation, making

eye contact and listening to others. She believes that although the virtual spaces encourage

connection with others, relationships suffer as they become more superficial in nature. There

is no denying the fact that online interactions such as text messages often lack facial

expressions, eye contact, tone inflections and body language. Although video messaging

platforms do incorporate some of these, young people often communicate with each other via

text messages.

Suler's theory of the "Online Disinhibition Effect" is based on the same premise.

Suler claims that people often show "toxic disinhibition" (Suler, 2004, p. 321) when

interacting with others online: "We witness rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred,

even threats. Or people visit the dark underworld of the internet—places of pornography,

crime, and violence—territory they would never explore in the real world." (ibid). According

to Suler, the relative anonymity and invisibility that the internet affords users are important

factors in how people treat each other online. Suler maintains that when people interact without showing their real-life identity, there is more tendency for them to behave badly, since there are essentially no consequences to their misbehaviour. Similarly, invisibility gives people the courage to act differently to how they would act in their face-to-face interactions with others. When communicating with others via text, people are not concerned with how they look or sound to others, and often miss the signs of disapproval such as a frown, or a shaking head. Thus, some social constraints and inhibitions are sometimes relaxed, or completely abandoned in online interactions with others.

Ten of the participants in this study (such as Mr. Catania) made reference to how anonymity on digital media sometimes leads to a loss of empathy for others. Although research on whether the use of technology affects empathy is far from conclusive, these participants talked about the lack of empathy that Maltese secondary school students sometimes show towards others when interacting online. They spoke about the disinhibition effect when claiming that many people often show a lack of empathy when interacting with others from behind a screen. Some participants, such as Mr. Grixti and Mr. Attard, spoke about a "lack of boundaries" in digital spaces, adding that students often insult their teachers or one another when interacting with each other online.   These participants seemed to agree with Bauman and Donskis (2013), who claimed that virtual life is eroding human compassion and promoting an indifference to the plight of others. These claims have also been made by others (Small & Vorgan, 2009; Turkle, 2011, 2016; Twenge et al., 2012; Konrath, 2013; Borba, 2017). The participants who spoke about a loss of empathy linked it to a rise in cases of cyberbullying.

Fourteen of the participants, most of whom worked in schools or worked directly with students, spoke at length about cyberbullying among secondary school students. Eleven of these participants claimed that cyberbullying among secondary school students has increased

drastically, and that school authorities often struggle to deal with it. According to the participants, one of the main problems with tackling cyberbullying is that school staff are often unsure whether they should intervene in cases of cyberbullying which happens outside of school premises. In fact, many of the participants talked about the "spill over" of cyberbullying from students' homes and outside spaces into the schools, and vice-versa.

The increase in the number of cases of cyberbullying and online harassment among Maltese secondary school students is not surprising. Floridi's concept of "onlife" (Floridi, 2007, p. 62) is based on the merging of people's online and offline lives. As students' interactions weave seamlessly in and out of the online and offline realms, traditional bullying and cyberbullying also become intertwined. In fact, the EU Kids Online Survey (Smahel et al. 2020) reports both forms of bullying together. Maltese children have the highest incidence of reported bullying in the EU (39% for 13 to 14- year-olds and 40% for 15 to 16-year-olds). According to the participants who took part in the EU Kids Online survey, most of this bullying took place online; in fact, for the 13 to 14-year-olds, cyberbullying accounted for 90% of cases of bullying (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). One of the most worrying pieces of data that came out of this survey is that most teenagers do not seek the help of their parents or their teachers when they encounter problematic issues online. When asked about whether their teachers have helped with any issues that had bothered them online, only 21% of 13 to 14-year-olds and 27% of 15 to 16-year-olds replied in the affirmative (ibid.).

The EU Kids Online data is supported by the data from the participant interviews emerging from this research. In the EU Kids Online survey, girls reported more cases of cyberbullying in general (ibid.). Some of the participants in this research also reported that girls were more likely to bully each other and be bullied online. The findings from this research also clearly show that educators find it difficult to understand how to tackle cyberbullying, since most of it happens outside school premises. Traditionally, there was a

rather clear distinction between what where the responsibilities of school authorities ended – any kind of misbehaviour or illegal activity which occurred outside school premises was not considered to be the school's remit, unless students were wearing the school uniform when they committed their misdeeds.

However, with cyberbullying, the distinction is rather unclear, because cyberbullying tends to merge with traditional bullying which might happen at school, and victims of cyberbullying might seek help from their teachers and guidance teachers, especially if the perpetrators and the victims attend the same school. As Terranova (2004) and Jurgenson (2012a) argue, digital spaces and physical spaces are intricately linked, and it does not make sense to talk about the two as separate realms. The fact that many of the participants talked about a distinction between the physical school environment and digital spaces populated by Maltese students suggests a conceptual vacuum (Moor, 1985, 2005). The findings show that there is a dissonance between the participants' perceptions of the distinction between the two realms, while at the same time, they talked about how their students' interactions constantly weaved between physical and digital spaces.

Thus, I suggest that this distinction between the physical school environment and the digital spaces populated by Maltese students has become obsolete. Students interact with each other in a variety of ways; when they are physically at school, outside school or on school transport, as well as online, when they interact on school platforms such as Microsoft Teams, on the schools' social media pages, in private groups via apps and via direct messages. Cases of cyberbullying often involve the use of multiple platforms, as well as an element of face-to-face aggression or exclusion. It is often further complicated when students from other schools are involved in the cyberbullying, either as victims or perpetrators. This is even more salient when one considers the shift towards the use of educational technologies. During 2020 and 2021, most students spent weeks, if not months, participating in online

synchronous lessons. Maltese schools promoted the use of Microsoft Teams for students to communicate with their teachers and with each other; in fact, all students have institutional access to Microsoft Teams which is provided by their schools. Although there are no official data or academic research to support this, many parents and teachers have claimed (anecdotally) that students have been cyberbullied via Microsoft Teams. A recent news report on an online newspaper shows that at least one student has been bullied by peers via Microsoft Teams (Barbara, 2022), while another newspaper article exposed a security flaw in the government-provided educational LearnPad tablets that allows anyone to access children via Microsoft Teams (Calleja, 2022). This effectively means that such cases of cyberbullying fall well within the remit of school authorities, and they can easily intervene since they can easily obtain access to the students' chat logs.

The data from the participant interviews also indicated that the participants who dealt directly with students (especially the teachers and heads of schools) were more concerned about cyberbullying. However, they tended to focus solely on the difficulties that cyberbullying poses for running a school. On the other hand, the policy makers and experts who were not based in schools or who did not deal directly with students were less likely to talk about cyberbullying as a concern, but when they did, they were more concerned about the negative effects of cyberbullying on the victims' wellbeing. This suggests that the educators who deal directly with students do not feel supported by the existing structures at policy level, and that they are more focused on stopping the cyberbullying, or dealing with its aftermaths in the day-to-day running of schools.

Mr. Spiteri, who ran the BeSmartOnline team, was the only participant who downplayed the effects of cyberbullying on their victims. He suggested that cyberbullying was so rampant among Maltese secondary school students that they have become almost immune to it. His view is similar to that of Bryce and Fraser (2013), who found that

cyberbullying is so common among young people, that they are not surprised when they get bullied when communicating with others in digital spaces.

However, the EU Kids Online findings do not support Mr. Spiteri's or Bryce and Fraser's conclusion, since 47% of 13 to 14-year-old and 61% of 15 to 16-year-old victims reported feeling fairly upset or very upset by the cyberbullying (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). These conflicting pieces of data can be explained by one's expectations towards cyberbullying. If one has a zero-tolerance policy to any form of bullying, such numbers would be shocking. However, if one's philosophy is that bullying in some form or another has always existed and that children learn to tolerate a certain amount of bullying, these figures could possibly be tolerable. This is the position taken by boyd, who dismisses most bullying as "teenage drama" (boyd, 2014, p. 136).

I do not agree with Mr. Spiteri's views on cyberbullying. As some of the participants have indicated, cyberbullying can often have more negative consequences than traditional bullying because it does not stop at the school gates. Children who are cyberbullied do not get a respite when they arrive home. It can be particularly corrosive because it can potentially be witnessed by many others, and it is sometimes aided by anonymity. On the other hand, unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is easier to sanction because it is easier to obtain evidence of it. Students often have screen shots, chat messages and even video clips which document their online abuse. Such evidence makes a zero-tolerance approach to bullying easier to enforce. Even if the bullying does not happen within school grounds, teachers and educators are duty-bound to report any suspicion of harm in relation to a child. In fact, recent legislation (Chapter 569) obliges all professionals working with children to report any suspicions of harm or criminal offence to a minor (under the age of 18) to the Director (Protection of Minors) or to the police. The Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act

(2020) came into effect in 2020, but the guidelines for professionals on mandatory reporting have just been published (backdated to 2020) (Government of Malta, 2020).

The findings from this research are consistent with Suler's theory of the Online Disinhibition Effect (Suler, 2004). The participants reported a sharp increase in cyberbullying cases among Maltese secondary school students, which is also consistent with the findings from the EU Kids Online survey (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). These findings imply that, in line with Suler's theory, adolescents' interactions with others tend to be more toxic when conducted behind a screen. This, coupled with the fact that their interactions have become "digital by default" (Stoilova et al., 2020, p. 198), makes it imperative for schools to address issues of cyberbullying, both through the formal curriculum, and through robust school policies which deal with incidents of cyberbullying in which students are either the victims or the perpetrators.

Theme 4: Internet Harms

Sexting, Revenge Porn and Pornography.

Although the main concern of most of the participants was cyberbullying, some of the participants mentioned other ethical issues that secondary school students can encounter when interacting online, such as sexting, revenge porn and online pornography. Sexting is one of the issues that often concerns educators, parents, policy makers and organisations working with youths (McGovern et al., 2016). Research shows that sexting has become commonplace among youths (Ringrose et al., 2012). Although research about Maltese youths in relation to sexting is scant, the EU Kids online survey showed that sexting among Maltese youths is prevalent (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020).

Earlier on, when discussing how youths use photos and selfies for impression management, I highlighted the link between Goffman's self-presentation theory and the use

of photos (Goffman 1959). I contend that this link can be extended to the use of sexting, or the sharing of sexual images of oneself via messaging (Lenhart, 2009). Although such photos are surely not what Goffman had in mind when formulating his theory, the way that youths use such photos to promote themselves with sexual partners or potential sexual partners is consistent with his theory. Adolescents are notorious for pushing sexual norms and boundaries, and modern technologies allow them to experiment and take risks. Previous generations of teenagers had to take photos with a traditional camera, then take the films to be developed and printed by special machines before they could share the printed photos with others. This would have meant that such photos would automatically have to be handled by unknown third parties, which would have made the whole process obviously risky. Risk-taking and sexual experimentation are also consistent with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950). Erikson's theory describes the identity versus confusion stage, which refers to a stage that adolescents who are between approximately 12 to 18 years of age go through. In this stage, they experiment with various aspects of their identity in order to receive feedback from others, which contributes to a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. Thus, sexting can be viewed as a form of sexual liberation and an acceptance of nudity, which can facilitate sexual agency (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014).

However, not everyone agrees with this optimistic view of sexting as a sexually liberating form of self-expression and sexual experimentation.   Other researchers view the practice of sexting as an objectification of the body (Jewell & Brown, 2013; Ringrose et al., 2012), arguing that people who engage in sexting are often trying to conform to the idealised body images perpetuated by the media (Ringrose et al., 2012).

The participants in this research who talked about sexting as a practice that Maltese secondary school students engage in tended to agree with the latter view. Although few of the participants mentioned sexting, the six participants who did mention it talked about it in

negative terms. Recently, the Office of the Commissioner for Children has written about sexting in a local newspaper, claiming that young people often underestimate the risks of sexting: "Adolescents explore their sexuality, which is part of growing up, however this is also taking place online. This can be of concern when they generate and share explicit photos or videos of themselves through social media and messaging apps" (Commissioner for Children, 2020).

The research about sexting among Maltese children indicates that among Maltese youths, sexting is as prevalent as it is among their EU counterparts. In fact, Maltese adolescents are the second most likely to send sexual images. According to the EU Kids Online survey, 8% of 12 to 14-year-olds and 22% of 15-16-year-olds have sent sexual messages (text, pictures or videos), while 21% of 12 to 14-year-olds and 44% of 15-16- year-olds reported receiving such messages in the year before the survey was conducted (Smahel et al., 2020). However, Deguara's research shows that sexting is not on the agenda of most educators. Deguara found that although sexting was prevalent among Maltese secondary school students, the school authorities showed a lack of awareness and understanding of the issue. She found that there were no sexting policies in place in schools, and the participants who worked in schools were unable to mention outside agencies which they could refer to when issues around sexting arose (Deguara, 2015).

The findings from my study are mostly congruent with Deguara's findings. Most of the participants did not seem to consider sexting to be an issue among Maltese secondary school students. In fact, the responses were varied, with three teachers saying that sexting among students is prevalent and sometimes comes up in class discussions, and others either not mentioning the issue at all, or reporting that the students that they teach have not really experienced sexting. Ms. Garcia Imbernon and Mr. Spiteri, both of whom were aware of the practice of sexting among secondary school students, linked it to revenge porn, saying that

although most people associate sexting with girls, nowadays, boys are often the victims of revenge porn. The Office of the Commissioner for Children recently wrote about the risks associated with sexting in a local newspaper, associating it with child abuse:

> Young people often underestimate the risks associated with the sharing of such material and often think that they are doing this in a trusting environment or are put under a lot of pressure to share such photos or videos. Young people might also be tempted to engage in such risky behaviour. Therefore, awareness raising and prevention programmes are essential to protect children and young people from becoming victims of sexual coercion and/or sextortion. (Commissioner for Children, 2020)

In fact, there is no specific legislation in Malta with regards to sexting between adolescents. All minors under the age of 18 are considered to be children, therefore the practice of sexting falls under Article 208A of the Criminal Code, which is a broad law covering all child indecent material. This law was amended in 2016 to address revenge porn (Article 208E of the criminal code), which refers to sharing sexual photos or videos which were intended for personal use as a means of revenge. Perpetrators are liable to a fine and up to two years imprisonment. Although very few people have been prosecuted for revenge porn, there have been a few cases which provoked public outcry. In a recent case, a young woman, who was still a student, filed a report when she found out that private explicit video which she had on her phone was being shared online. The video was also played on the television set of a restaurant when a local football player attached his smartphone to a television set during a dinner with his teammates. Subsequently, another video, which showed the team of football players laughing at the young woman's video, also went viral (Calleja, 2021; Cilia, 2021)

The research literature seems to indicate that sexting and the consumption of pornography among Maltese secondary school students is prevalent; however, it seems that many educators and policy makers do not acknowledge it as an important issue. When they do acknowledge it, they often conflate it with revenge porn or child abuse, which, in all fairness, is how it is considered under Maltese legislation. However, this is problematic in itself, because both the legislation and the educational system seem to be criminalising typical adolescent behaviour. This suggests both a conceptual and a policy vacuum (Moor, 1985, 2005). Moor contends that new technologies which have significant social impact bring about new ethical challenges, and until society collectively understands the impact of these new technologies, there is often a significant conceptual vacuum, resulting in a policy vacuum. Thus, in the case of adolescent sexting, which under Maltese law is classified under child pornography, legislation, as well as education and safeguarding policies seem to be operating in a conceptual vacuum.

These findings on Maltese secondary school students' use of sexting and pornography support evidence from a UK 2021 Ofsted report, which reports on the prevalence of sexting and the consumption of online pornography among UK secondary school students. However, the Ofsted report highlights the different experiences between males and female students. It shows that the vast majority of female secondary school students reported being pressured into sharing sexual images, having their images re-shared with others, and being sent unsolicited sexual pictures or photos through online messaging platforms such as Snapchat or WhatsApp. Some students talked about this behaviour as being so commonplace that they regard it as part of adolescent life. Some girls pointed to a lack of explicit teaching of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, feeling that the responsibility to educate boys had been left to them. School leaders believed that the easy access to pornography sets unhealthy expectations of sexual relationships and shapes perceptions of women and girls. The report

also highlights the fact that many students do not report online abuse, especially if the incidents take place outside school. This was especially the case when students thought that they would not be believed if they spoke up, or that school staff would not deal with the incidents in a sensitive manner (Ofsted, 2021). However, EU Kids Online survey (Smahel et al., 2020) and the findings from this study do not show this disparity between the experiences of Maltese female and male students. This might indicate a measure of gender equality among Maltese youths, but it is very difficult to establish this since the data are so limited.

In conclusion, the data from this research do not give a clear picture of the prevalence of sexting, revenge porn and pornography consumption amongst Maltese secondary school students, because the research was not designed to do so. However, it does shed some insights on the ways that schools respond to these issues. Some of the educators, policy makers and experts who were interviewed seemed almost oblivious to these issues, while others said that like their EU and UK counterparts, Maltese secondary school students regularly take indecent photos of themselves, share them with others, consume pornography and have their images shared without their consent. These mixed responses seem to indicate that Maltese educators and policy makers are not fully aware of what Maltese adolescents are up to in their free time, and that tackling such issues are not considered to be a priority. This probably stems from the fact that Malta is still a predominantly Roman Catholic country, and such topics are not often talked about. However, this does not mean that these things do not happen, in fact, the research shows otherwise. Another explanation could be the lack of reporting of such issues. Since Maltese schools ban the use of smartphones in school, students might not feel that the school has anything to do with whatever happens in online spaces outside of school hours. Students might also be ashamed of talking about such issues, especially to their teachers.

Online Hate Speech and Extremism.

According to a Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2018b) the Maltese were the most likely in the EU to encounter hate speech online, in fact, 55% of the Maltese reported encountering hate speech, which is almost double the EU average of 29%. In spite of this, the issue of hate speech in Malta has not been given much importance in the academic literature, probably because hate speech is rarely reported to the police (Vella Muskat, 2016). According to a MaltaToday article, Malta has a "culture of normalised hate-speech" (MaltaToday, 2020), with prominent public figures sometimes resorting to online hate speech, especially against women involved in politics or activism (Diacono, 2018; Carabott, 2019, Galea Debono, 2020). In response to the growing hate speech on social media, a unit which specialises in hate crime and hate speech was inaugurated in 2019 (Malta Independent, 2019).

Unfortunately, there are no data regarding the prevalence of hate speech or other hate-based abuse among Maltese youths. Although hate speech has become normalised on Maltese social media, it has not been given much importance as a research topic. This could be due to the fact that until recently, Malta had a relatively homogenous population, with very few migrants settling on the island. However, after EU accession in 2003, the number of migrants has increased rapidly (Martin, 2017).   This means that many of the 'foreigners' living on the island (which is what they are still called by the general Maltese population) are first generation migrants and have not yet had the opportunity to become fully-fledged Maltese citizens. In fact, Maltese citizenship is notoriously difficult to acquire, since Maltese law grants the Minister in charge of citizenship the right to decide on whether to grant citizenship by naturalisation on a case-by-case basis. Although the minimum period of residency is five years, anecdotal evidence suggests that applications are not usually considered until migrants have been living on the island for eighteen years, unless they

qualify for citizenship by investment, which is only possible for very rich people, or "high net-worth individuals" (Maltese Citizenship Act, 1964).

This effectively means that the change in Maltese demographics was quite rapid and many of these migrants have not fully integrated into Maltese culture, while the Maltese have not yet become accustomed to sharing the country and its resources with them. This is also compounded by the fact that Malta is a very densely populated country; in fact, it is the most densely populated country in the EU, with the largest population increase in the EU by far due to migration (Eurostat, 2018). In 2019, it was estimated that a fourth of the population was made up of 'foreigners', a figure which does not include migrant children, EU nationals who are not registered as Maltese residents, third country nationals who are unemployed or working without a permit, and asylum seekers who are not yet in possession of their documents (Diacono, 2019).   The results of the 2021 census, which was the first of its kind designed to collect information on sexual orientation, race and religion (Sansone, 2021), have not yet been published. Sean Gauci, a teenage candidate for the local council election, recently complained of becoming a minority in his own country and stated that the "foreigners" will bring about a "degradation of our identity, language, culture and values" (Cilia, 2019).

Thus, although it is clear that some Maltese blame the 'foreigners' for taking their jobs and contributing to the densely populated urban environment, these tensions have not resulted in major incidents. The first racially-motivated murder occurred in 2019, when two members of the Armed Forces of Malta shot a black man in cold blood, deliberately targeting him due to the colour of his skin (Brincat, 2021). In spite of the prevalence of online hate speech, the topic of extremism and radicalisation does not seem to be on the agenda of the general Maltese population.   This is probably because there have been no cases of terrorist-related hate crime in Malta. I believe that the absence of cases of hate crimes which result in

deaths or extreme violence gives Maltese citizens a false sense of security that online extremism and radicalisation are not issues that they need to be worried about. Indeed, none of the participants mentioned them specifically.

Unlike educators in other countries, Maltese teachers are not obliged to actively teach against extremism and radicalisation, or even to report potential cases. This lack of awareness makes it close to impossible to gauge whether online extremism and radicalisation among Maltese youths pose a threat. The only data that exist emerge from a Eurobarometer survey, in which 12% of Maltese respondents reported coming across some kind of terrorist material online. This figure is double the EU average of 6% (European Commission, 2018b). Although this survey was not aimed at youths, it seems plausible that they are at greater risk than adults. This is because of two main reasons. The first reason is that young people are more likely to be targeted by potential recruiters for violent extremist acts than older people. Recruiters often target young, impressionable youths via social media, especially focusing on those coming from vulnerable and marginalised groups (Weimann, 2016). The other reason is that youths tend to spend a longer amount of time on digital devices than adults. The amount of time that they spend online was intensified during the pandemic, when students were expected to access some, if not all of their education online, and had less opportunity to be involved in other activities.

The findings from this research show that teachers and heads of schools do not have clear guidelines on what to do if they encounter serious issues of student extremism or radicalisation, since there are no policies in place.

This brings us to the end of the discussion of the findings related to the first research question, which focused on the perspectives of educators, experts and policy makers regarding the extent to which the unethical uses of technology and social media impinge on the lives of Maltese secondary school students. The next section will discuss the findings

from the second research question, which deals with the role of school policies in addressing

such issues.

Research Question 2: How do Maltese Secondary School Policies Promote Digital

Citizenship?

Theme 1: Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Policies

One of the interesting findings of this research was that although the use of digital

devices in schools was not the focus of the research, eight of the participants, most of whom

were educators (teachers and heads of schools), brought it up during the course of the

interview. This signifies that it was on their minds, probably due to the fact that all Maltese

upper primary school students make use of a state-sponsored tablet to use at home and in the

classroom. There has also been talk about a Bring Your Own Device policy in secondary

schools, but it has not yet materialised.

Maltese classrooms are relatively well-equipped with regards to digital technologies.

All primary, middle and secondary schools have interactive whiteboards available in

classrooms, and LearnPad tablets are provided to all students in the upper primary school

(years 4, 5 and 6). However, secondary school students do not currently make use of

personal devices in schools. The Directorate for Digital literacy and Transversal Skills is

currently running a pilot project in secondary schools, the aim of which is to decide whether

to opt for tablets or laptops for secondary school students.   However, as the participants

noted, the use of smartphones in schools is very much frowned upon, and although the Bring

Your Own Device (BYOD) policy has been discussed with school leaders, it has not been

introduced so far. This effectively means that apart from the two secondary schools which

are currently participating in the pilot project, students in secondary schools do not yet have

access to any portable devices. In fact, Malta is possibly one of the few countries in Europe in

which the use of mobile phones in schools is banned across all schools. Although there are ongoing discussions about the BYOD policy, there are no concrete plans to implement it in schools. This is probably due to the fact that it does not have widespread support among Maltese teachers.

Although Selwyn et al. (2018) found that the use of personal devices did not lead to excessive off-task use in Australian secondary schools, they often observed students responding to text messages and sometimes even taking calls during lessons. These messages and calls were usually initiated by the students' parents or carers, and proved to be a nuisance for schools to manage. Although there is nothing in the data that suggests this, my personal knowledge of the Maltese context leads me to believe that Maltese teachers would be very wary about this, since they often express concern about students secretly contacting parents during the school day via phones smuggled into the school. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in 2019, an altercation between two students in a school escalated when one of the students contacted his father via a mobile phone which he had smuggled into the school, and the father entered the school premises and injured two educators. The brawl was reported to the media (Calleja, 2019), but the information about the mobile phone was not, although it was widely circulated among teachers working in local schools.

The interview data showed that most of the participants were also concerned with the effect of technology use on attention. Four of the participants claimed that using technological devices such as smartphones and tablets in schools can be problematic because they can be used unethically and can prove to be a distraction from lessons. It is clear that teenagers are highly motivated to use devices such as tablets, smartphones and gaming consoles, for entertainment, schoolwork and connecting with others. Digital technologies and new media such as video games and social media platforms meet Davenport and Beck's (2001) four criteria for successful user engagement: relevance, engagement, community and

convenience. According to Davenport and Beck, these technologies are designed in such a way to grab people's attention, making it harder for adolescents to switch off, or to focus on activities such studying, reading or homework. This could potentially disrupt their studies or contribute to lower grades.

It could also pose problems if (or when) the Bring Your own Device (BYOD) policy is introduced in Maltese schools. Although this policy is nowadays often considered to be a necessity, especially due to the proliferation in educational technology brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, one must not be too hasty in implementing such a policy in Maltese schools. It would require special teacher training, not just to train teachers to deal with hardware issues, but to train them to acquire new classroom management techniques and learn how to support students with the transition. It must be noted that since Maltese schools effectively ban smartphones and students' personal gadgets, the transition from this near total ban to a BYOD policy would be nothing short of revolutionary. Thus, it is imperative that both the school leadership team, the teachers and students are well prepared for this change. The policy should be effectively communicated to the students and their parents or caregivers and explicitly lay out the consequences for any breaches of policy.

The tablets that are currently used in primary schools are not a good indication of how the BYOD policy would work in Maltese secondary schools, because the LearnPad tablets that are used rely on a highly restricted platform, which makes it very difficult for students to do anything on them outside of the installed applications. They are not connected to social media platforms, and their use is regulated by the educational organisation's administrators.

Although some of the participants seemed to be wary of the use of digital devices in secondary schools, their views might have changed following the popularity of educational technologies in the midst of the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of the perceptions towards technology. Teachers and students have had to rely on Microsoft

Teams for online learning, and for communication with students outside of lesson time. It was also used for students to hand in their work to avoid handling of paper due to health reasons. Any work which was handed in as a hard copy had to stay in quarantine for three days. The School Leadership Team now communicates with parents via digital platforms such as MySchool, which is a school management software that allows the publication of academic results, student attendance, communication with parents, and so on and so forth. Thus, it would be interesting to ask the participants whether they still think that the risks outweigh the benefits of introducing the BYOD policy in schools, or whether they now view technology as a necessary educational tool.

Theme 2: School Policies on Tackling Unethical Uses of Digital Technologies and New Media

One of the interesting findings that emerged was that Maltese educators struggled to devise and enforce policies that aim to promote digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools. This was repeatedly emphasised by the participants, especially educators, with respect to cases of cyberbullying involving students.

Discipline policies in Maltese schools have traditionally made a distinction between dealing with student misbehaviour which occurs at school, and that which occurs outside of school. For example, in the case of traditional bullying, school authorities tend not to get involved unless it happens on school grounds, or at most, happens while students are wearing the school uniform on the way to or from school. However, this distinction has always been murky, since bullying between students tends to transfer from one context to another. The distinction has now become even murkier with the introduction of digital technologies. As discussed earlier, online and offline interactions are often intertwined (Terranova, 2004; Jurgenson, 2012a, 2012b, Floridi, 2007, 2015), and online and offline bullying often merge

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into each other (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). For example, the use of Microsoft Teams as an online platform used by schools has introduced a new dimension to cyberbullying. It provides a way for students to communicate with each other digitally through a platform which is provided by the school. This effectively means that by providing the platform and encouraging students to use it, school authorities have assumed some responsibility for monitoring students' behaviour on it. This example shows how the distinctions between online/offline and within school premises/outside school premises have become rather blurred. Although this is a recent development, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants' responses showed that schools had already been struggling to deal with issues of cyberbullying which happens outside of school premises.

The participants' responses, as well as the analysis of the actual policies, show that educators do not feel that the existing policies are fit for purpose.   Many of the participants seemed to be at a loss to how to deal with cyberbullying, and the general feeling was that school authorities only act on cases of cyberbullying when they result in fights between students on school premises.

Mr. Darmanin's comment about how educators were "washing their hands" of cyberbullying was particularly harsh, but, judging from the other participants' comments, not entirely unwarranted. The participants' responses pointed towards a lack of official strategies for dealing with cyberbullying. Some of the participants mentioned different strategies, such as asking the police Cybercrime Unit to organise talks in schools and tackling instances of cyberbullying through a psycho-social approach, with the intervention of guidance teachers and school councillors. Some of the participants talked about ad-hoc solutions, such as asking some parents who work in law enforcement (for example, judges or magistrates) to give a talk to the students, sanctioning students involved in cyberbullying by asking them to run a school campaign about the responsible use of social media, or sending them to the

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"Learning Zone", which involves pulling students out of mainstream classes in order to deal with behavioural issues in a more "holistic" manner.

The lack of clear policy seems to indicate that cyberbullying has not been given the importance that it deserves. As explained earlier, The Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act, which came into effect in 2020, makes it clear that teachers and educators are duty-bound to report any suspicion of harm in relation to a child. Recently, it has been reported that cyberbullying is set to become a specific crime, punishable by imprisonment for a term of between one and five years, a fine, or both (Times of Malta, 2022). If this law were to pass, it would have clear implications for students of 14 years and over, since 14 is the age of criminal responsibility in Malta.

The lack of official strategies to contain cyberbullying in schools constitutes a policy vacuum (Moor, 1985, 2005), since the current cyberbullying policies do not seem to be helping educators deal with instances of cyberbullying. I believe that the fault lies with the lack of clear direction that schools receive about what constitutes cyberbullying, and what lies within their remit. The national anti-bullying policy (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2014) was published in 2014 and has never been updated. Although the policy does mention cyberbullying, it merely lists it as one of the types of bullying, rather than the main form of bullying, which is what recent data about bullying suggests (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020). Although there is another document which provides guidelines for the Senior Management Team to deal with cyberbullying, it does not have the status of an official policy. I believe this document is certainly a step in the right direction, because it provides school leaders with a standard operating procedure for tackling and reporting cyberbullying. It makes no distinction between cyberbullying which happens on school premises and cyberbullying which happens outside of school (Ministry for Education and Employment, n.d.). My main concern is that this document does not have official status, in fact, it does not

even bear a date of publishing, and is not listed as an official policy. In fact, none of the participants made reference to it. This might be due to two reasons, either because this document was published after the collection of data, or because it was not communicated to the participants.

Although most of the participants made a reference to the issues faced by educators when dealing with cyberbullying in schools, it was evident that the lack of policies also extended to other issues such as sexting, hate speech and extremism. It seemed like it did not occur to the participants that schools should have any policies to deal with such issues. In fact, only Mr. Saliba suggested that schools should have clear policies on how to deal with unethical uses of technology and new media. The fact that most of the participants were not concerned about the lack of policies is probably because of two reasons.

The first reason is that students engaging in such practices is a relatively new phenomenon, and unlike cyberbullying, they have not yet caused a lot of disciplinary problems in schools. The second reason is that many educators do not feel that they should get involved in sanctioning any behaviour which is not clearly related to the school environment. Thus, it is interesting to note that the participants who were complaining about the fact that the schools do not get involved enough in cases of cyberbullying did not feel like there was anything lacking with regards to other unethical issues such as sexting, hate speech and extremism. This is definitely something that would have to be addressed before the introduction of a BYOD policy in schools.

Another interesting finding that emerged concerns online interactions between teachers and students. Again, it is evident that there is a lack of official policy which regulates the appropriate social media use between students and their educators. Two of the participants, Mr. Gatt and Mr. Spiteri, referred to this issue when they talked about teachers' use of social media. However, they made very different comments with regards to this topic.

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Mr. Gatt was emphatic about the need for teachers to connect with students on social media in order to model professional and ethical behaviour and act as role models for the students. On the other hand, Mr. Spiteri focused on teachers who did the opposite, claiming that many teachers do not act as good role models. Although he did not give much indication of what he meant by this comment, he alluded to teachers who post inappropriate photos on their social media profile and "friend" students on social media platforms. He also talked about the need for social media guidelines for educators, advocating for specific sanctions tied to the infringement of such guidelines.

The current Teachers' Code of Ethics and Practice, published in 2012 (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012b), states that teachers should avoid inappropriate communication with students through social media. However, this was deemed to be rather vague, so in December of 2018, a few weeks before the interview with Mr. Spiteri took place, the Ministry of Education and Employment released a draft policy on educators' use of social media. This draft policy had been a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Employment and BeSmartOnline, which Mr. Spiteri was running at the time. According to this draft policy, educators would not have been allowed to exchange private text messages, phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses or photos of a personal nature with students and parents (Martin, 2018). A few days after the draft policy was published, the Malta Union of Teachers directed its members to ignore the policy, and subsequently, the policy has not been republished or replaced. However, on March 20 of 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown and after the closure of schools, the Malta Union of Teachers published its own guidelines on social media use, which was aimed at protecting teachers, rather than sanctioning them for the inappropriate use of social media (Malta Union of Teachers, 2020).

It must be noted that in the Maltese context, it is often difficult to justify sanctioning educators who exchange private text messages or phone numbers with students or their

parents. The small size of the country makes it very likely for educators to be socially connected to students and/or their parents, either through family relationships or social circles. Thus, such a policy would have created considerable bureaucratic difficulties in practice, and it is not surprising that the teacher union shot it down. However, just like students, educators should have clear but practical guidelines about their social media use, especially since they are the ones who are responsible for teaching students about how to use technology and new media more responsibly. These guidelines would help educators model the responsible use of social media and delineate the parameters of appropriate online communication with their students.

One of the themes that often cropped up when discussing policies regarding to promote digital citizenship in secondary schools was the "responsibility" of schools and educators to teach students how to make responsible and ethical use of digital technologies in a holistic manner. Unsurprisingly, all the participants stated that students must be taught that societal norms and values also apply to the digital realm. Some of the participants gave practical suggestions on how this can be achieved, such as through drama, whole school campaigns and through the cooperation of Maltese influencers; however, these do not seem to be happening on a national level. This is not to say that individual schools are not taking digital citizenship seriously. As Ms. Garcia Imbernon said, sometimes educators work in "silos", that is, there might be some attempts at solving issues in some schools, but these good practices might not necessarily be communicated with other schools.

Despite the participants' insistence on schools' responsibility to promote the responsible use of digital technologies and social media, during the course of the interviews it soon became clear that there is no national strategy on the promotion of digital citizenship, or digital education in its wider sense. It must be pointed out that many of the participants occupied key positions and were well-placed to formulate and implement such a policy. This

seems to point to a dissonance between what the participants reported during the interview, that is, the importance they placed on digital citizenship, and what actually transpired in practice. During the interview, Mr. Grixti, the Director for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills, explained that his team was working on such a strategy. However, to date, this strategy has not yet been published, probably due to the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This section was by far the shortest of the three, since the participants had much more to say about themes related to the first and the third research questions. The main findings that emerged pointed to a lack of cohesive strategy for promoting digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools, and a lack of specific policies to deal with unethical behaviour related to the use of digital technologies and new media. The participants made varied responses regarding the effectiveness of the existing school policies. Many of the participants talked about a lack of strategy for tackling cyberbullying, making it clear that the policies which were in place at the time of data collection were not perceived as adequate. It is particularly concerning to note that although the BeSmartOnline team employ a cross-curricular approach, they were very rarely mentioned by practitioners working in school. This points to a lack of visibility of BeSmartOnline in schools, and a dissonance between what the policy makers thought that the extra-curricular activities were achieving and their real impact in schools. In fact, one of the participants (Ms. Farrugia) said that the school that she taught in did not take the cross-curricular approach to digital citizenship, preferring to rely on the different curricular subjects to tackle the topic. She suggested making the use of drama for such an approach. This suggestion was further elaborated on by another participant (Mr. Gatt). I believe that the drama and other cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities such as twinning projects, collaborative activities and so on, could be excellent tools for getting the message across. However, they should be accompanied by a robust curriculum which tackles

digital citizenship from different angles. Thus, the next section will discuss the findings from the third research question, which focuses on the subjects within the Maltese secondary school curriculum which deal with digital citizenship.

Research Question 3: How Does the Maltese Secondary School Curriculum Promote Digital Citizenship?

Chapter 4, which presented the findings of the research, identified what the Maltese secondary school curriculum includes in terms of subject content related to digital citizenship, as well as the teaching time dedicated to this subject content. This section will discuss the curriculum, in terms of its strengths, as well as its gaps and limitations with regards to digital citizenship.

Theme 1: Cross-curricular and Extra-curricular Approaches to Teaching Digital Citizenship

The Maltese National Curriculum Framework and its supporting Learning Outcomes Framework give considerable importance to digital literacy, which includes an element of digital citizenship, although it is much wider in scope. This is also evidenced by the fact that within the Ministry of Education, there is a whole Directorate which is tasked with ensuring that the digital literacy outcomes are reached in a cross-curricular manner. However, the fact that digital literacy is not a statutory subject in its own right makes this very difficult to enforce.

The Education Officers for each curricular subject are responsible for the syllabus and its implementation in schools. Thus, in order for the cross-curricular outcomes to be taught in schools, the Education Officers who are responsible for digital literacy must negotiate with the Education Officers of the curricular subjects to incorporate some of the digital literacy

learning outcomes within the subject syllabi. Thus, for example, to ensure that the digital literacy learning outcome "I am aware of cultural diversity online" (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2015) is reached, the digital literacy Education Officers would need to ask other Education Officers, such as those for PSCD, Social Studies or Ethics, to include this learning outcome in one of these syllabi. This is complicated by the fact that the curricular subject Education Officers form part of the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP) while the digital literacy Education Officers form part of the Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills, so this cooperation cannot be taken for granted. In fact, it often comes down to good relationships between the different Education Officers, since the subject syllabi are often the result of a great deal of negotiation between different stakeholders.

This approach is far from ideal, because as Mr. Camilleri (the PSCD Education Officer) explained, the Education Officers of the curricular subjects often do not feel a sense of ownership over the digital literacy learning outcomes, and do not consider them to be their responsibility. Mr. Camilleri also reported that teachers also feel unprepared to teach digital citizenship, since their teacher training courses would not have prepared them for this approach. This is consistent with Barbara's research with teachers of Ethics, some of whom did not feel prepared with teaching issues related to cyberethics, such as sexting and cyberbullying (Barbara, 2019) and Yamano's earlier research, which found that teachers often had difficulties with teaching ethical behaviour online, and felt that they did not have the required time and training to do so (Yamano, 2004).

The findings from this research show that this cross-curricular approach lacks coherence, because the inclusion of the digital literacy learning outcomes in other curricular subjects is often a hit-and-miss affair. The teachers who participated in this research seemed to be mostly concerned about the content in the subject that they taught and did not seem to

be aware of what was being tackled other subjects, or in an extra-curricular manner. Some of the participants mentioned the BeSmartOnline team, while others had barely heard of it. Two of the participants talked about the role of school assemblies, while a few participants spoke about talks given by police officers from the Cybercrime Unit. This seems to indicate that, as Ms. Garcia Imbernon said, educators tend to work in silos without knowing what other educators are achieving in their respective areas.   It also says a lot about teacher training, which, as Mr. Camilleri indicated, is mostly concerned with teaching the subjects that prospective teachers choose as their main or subsidiary areas.

Although Mr. Grixti (the Director responsible for the Digital literacy and Transversal Skills Directorate) defended the cross-curricular approach which is currently being used, he admitted that teaching Digital literacy as a subject in its own right would ensure that students would be taught all the required knowledge, skills and attitudes. Digital literacy and digital citizenship have become so crucial to our lives that the educational system cannot rely on a piecemeal approach. I believe that the current approach to teaching digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools does not fulfil Malta's obligations to follow the Council of Europe's guidelines which aim to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment. The Council of Europe guidelines, which were adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 4 July 2018, state that children need special protection online and need to be taught how to stay safe online and how to get the most out of their use of the internet. The guidelines advocate for the teaching of digital literacy: "Digital literacy education should be included in the basic education curriculum from the earliest years, taking into account children's evolving capacities" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 18). The fact that the digital literacy learning outcomes are not incorporated into the statutory curriculum, but are on its fringes, suggests a dissonance between what the Learning Outcomes Framework seeks to achieve and what it does achieve in practice. Thus,

I believe that the cross-curricular and extra-curricular approaches fall short of ensuring a clear and unified framework to teaching digital citizenship. Since the digital literacy outcomes do not spell out what is being taught, at which stage (primary, middle or secondary school) and through which subject, there is currently no way of ensuring that these important learning outcomes are being met.

Theme 2: The Maltese Secondary School Curriculum and Digital Citizenship

After discussing the cross-curricular and extra-curricular approaches to the teaching of digital citizenship in Maltese schools, I will now turn my attention to discussing the data which emerged regarding the way that digital citizenship is taught through the national curriculum in secondary schools. I have chosen to start with the PSCD, Social Studies, ICT and Religion syllabi because are the only statutory subjects in the Maltese curriculum that deal with digital citizenship or, in the case of Religion, could be well placed to deal with such topics. Other statutory subjects, such as Mathematics, English and Maltese do not deal with such issues at all. Thus, students who do not take optional subjects such as Media Literacy, only come into contact with digital citizenship via the these 'core' subjects.

This statutory provision is a far cry from what is recommended by the Council of Europe or the Maltese National Digital Strategy of 2014-2020, which states that:

> Digital Citizenship will become part of the National Education Curriculum, to equip children and youths with the abilities to interact and use the Internet safely and intelligently. Parents and carers will be involved together with educators and youth workers. This action will stimulate the production of creative online content, empower the younger generation and help create a safer environment. With the support of competent authorities this measure will help combat cyber child abuse and exploitation (Digital Malta, 2014, p. 28).

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Although, in theory, digital citizenship is included in the national curriculum through the digital literacy learning outcomes, as I have explained above, the only way to ensure that these learning outcomes are covered across the general school population is to incorporate them into statutory curricular subjects such as PSCD, ICT and Social Studies (General).

The Social Studies (General) syllabus, which, as explained earlier, is the syllabus which is considered to be the core entitlement of all students, makes no reference to digital citizenship. In fact, it almost makes no reference to the digital spaces at all, not even through topics like citizenship, community and the economy. The only reference is found in the year 11 syllabus, which mentions global mass media as one of the positive effects of globalisation. Although the Social Studies syllabus was last revised in 2016, it seems very out of touch with the reality of modern youths. This is not surprising, as the Council of Europe literature review and multi-stakeholder consultations also indicated that "digital citizenship is only now beginning to feature on the agenda of many European governments" (Council of Europe, 2017, p. 42). I believe that there are two possible reasons for the lack of digital citizenship topics in the Social Studies syllabus. The first, which I believe to be the more salient, is that since Social Studies is only allocated one lesson a week, the syllabus can only cover what is deemed to be absolutely necessary. Thus, unfortunately, topics such as community, citizenship and the economy cannot be covered in enough depth to cover all important aspects. In fact, this was something that one of the participants commented on. Ms. Farrugia reported that she is precluded from covering digital citizenship topics adequately in Social Studies, due to the lack of teaching time allocated to the subject. The second reason for the lack of digital citizenship learning outcomes in the syllabus could be an assumption that teachers would interpret the learning outcomes in such a way as to include more topical subjects. There is some evidence for this, since after admitting that the syllabus does not cover digital citizenship, Mr. Chircop reported that teachers are encouraged to go beyond the

syllabus to include "current affairs". Ms. Farrugia confirmed this when she explained that when tackling the topic of bullying, which is in the syllabus, she also discusses cyberbullying with the students. Thus, although the syllabus does not specifically cover digital citizenship, the topics do lend themselves to being interpreted in a wider manner. However, one cannot assume that all teachers are doing this. Unless the syllabus is updated to include more direct reference to digital citizenship, there is a danger that not all students will be getting the same provision in terms of content related to digital citizenship. Thus, it can be concluded that although Social Studies seems like the ideal vehicle for the teaching of digital citizenship, the amount of time allocated to it in the school curriculum precludes it from being sufficient in terms of content.

Although the ICT and PSCD syllabi are more promising in their coverage of digital citizenship learning outcomes, they still suffer from a lack of teaching time. When one takes a closer look at the amount of teaching hours dedicated to digital citizenship topics, it shows that in reality, there is not enough time to discuss any of them in great detail. For example, the PSCD year 9 syllabus only dedicates three hours to discussing topics related to digital citizenship, with all three hours dedicated to managing online reputation and protecting the privacy of others, while the year 10 and 11 syllabus have even less time dedicated to digital citizenship. Similarly, ICT, which, like Social Studies, is only allocated one lesson a week, actually dedicates very little time to digital citizenship. The lack of time dedicated to these topics leads me to believe that although, in theory, the syllabi do cover such topics, they are often tackled through direct instruction, rather than through class discussions. This is congruent with what Yamano (2004) found when interviewing teachers about how they teach about ethical behaviour online. The teachers reported not having enough time to tackle such topics adequately and admitted to using direct instruction rather than through discussions and activities.

Although the PSCD syllabus does not dedicate a lot of time to teaching digital citizenship, there is quite a lot of effort dedicated to it in terms of the production of resources and teacher training. The collaboration with BeSmartOnline is very positive on two counts. First of all, as Mr. Camilleri and Mr. Spiteri indicated, the BeSmartOnline consortium comes with a considerable amount of funding, which can be very useful when conducting national campaigns and producing resources for schools. The PSCD team, together with the BeSmartOnline team, has produced three very useful video clips for secondary school. Unlike other videos commonly found on social media, the videos were made in Malta, using local actors, and are in Maltese (with English subtitles). This makes them unique in this respect, because Maltese teachers usually use teaching resources made in other English-speaking countries. Although such resources have the advantage of being freely available, the context is not always aligned with the Maltese context. Thus, the PSCD video clips are very useful for promoting digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools, because they have been made with Maltese adolescents in mind.

The PSCD and BeSmartOnline collaboration has also been instrumental in providing teacher training in teaching digital citizenship. The two teams have organised seminars for teachers, heads of schools and other stakeholders, and they have put digital citizenship on the map. The findings clearly show that one of the advantages of teaching digital citizenship through PSCD is that the methodology employed for PSCD is conducive to having class discussions. As Mr. Camilleri explained, PSCD teachers are more flexible in the way that they cover the syllabus because they are not in a rush to cover all the topics, since PSCD is the only subject in secondary school which is not examined via an examination. This essentially means that although the syllabus does not allocate that much time to teaching digital citizenship, some teachers might decide to allocate more time to cover these topics in more detail, at the expense of other topics. Furthermore, PSCD is the only subject which

benefits from smaller classes, since bigger classes are split in half. This is to ensure that there is enough space for circle time, which is the preferred methodology for holding class discussions. The findings show that these two factors are instrumental to the teaching of digital citizenship in schools. Although the syllabus does not give particular importance to the teaching of digital citizenship, the collaboration with the BeSmartOnline team ensures that digital citizenship topics are given more attention than some of the other topics in the syllabus. Thus, one can conclude that in the case of PSCD, there is a policy vacuum (the syllabus), but not a conceptual one. It is clear that the PSCD Education Officers transmit the importance of teaching digital citizenship, although the syllabus itself is not as extensive as one would hope for.

The PSCD syllabus focuses on cyberbullying, the digital footprint, sexual grooming, digital blackmail, sextortion, sharing of personal information and protecting the privacy of others online. This is consistent with what James (2014) has found, that is, that schools tend to focus on protecting youths from predators, rather than on their ethical responsibilities toward others. As discussed earlier, James' research indicates that ethical issues are often not discussed in depth in schools and are often reduced to consequence-oriented messages which revolve around cyber safety and cybersecurity, rather than cyberethics.

The PSCD syllabus makes no attempt to deal with topics such as hate speech, extremism or digital rights. It can be argued that PSCD teaches about respect for the self and for others, respect for diversity and fosters critical thinking, which are the prerequisites for interacting with others, both online and offline. However, in light of the growing use of technology and new media, I do not consider the current PSCD syllabus to be adequate in dealing with all the ethical issues that youths might encounter online. Furthermore, merely mentioning such issues is not enough. Subjects which deal with digital citizenship and ethical issues must dedicate enough time to discuss ethical issues in depth and resist

superficial ways of dealing with them, since ethical issues are often very complex in nature. For example, when tackling the phenomenon of hate speech, care must be taken not to oversimplify the concept. The line that separates freedom of expression and hate speech is often very fine, and thus both need careful examination. Thus, it is not enough to tell students that hate speech is a crime and that it is not morally right to engage in it. A discussion about hate speech and freedom of expression would require that both concepts are first defined, and examples or case studies are presented to the students. The concepts of empathy and respect for the other would also need to be woven into the discussion, in order for it to be meaningful. I find Mattson's approach to digital citizenship to be very useful (Mattson, 2021), and I think that this approach should also be used for topics which are not covered by Mattson's curriculum.

Like the PSCD syllabus, the new ICT syllabus also makes an attempt at teaching digital citizenship. This syllabus is certainly an improvement over the previous syllabus, which was mainly concerned with teaching fundamental digital skills. This new syllabus, called the C3 syllabus, deals with topics such as cyberbullying, digital blackmail, sextortion, the ethics of biomechanical enhancement/robotic body modification, the ethical implications of robots and Artificial Intelligence, the digital divide and copyright laws. Unfortunately, since it is a new syllabus and had not yet been rolled out in schools at the time of interview, the ICT teachers could not comment extensively on this syllabus. However, Mr. Catania, the ICT Education Officer, was very forthcoming about the challenges related to the teaching of ICT in schools. He talked about a lack of resources such as books and personal computers in the school computer labs, a shortage of ICT teachers, which he blamed on low salaries, and a lack of time for Continuous Professional Development courses for teachers. These shortcomings show that in spite of the professed importance given to digital literacy, the reality points to a severe underfunding for such an important statutory subject. Mr. Catania

also reported that he was pressured to remove some controversial subjects related to "The Ethical Decisions of Enhancing Life with Technological Means" when Church school representatives claimed that such subjects go against their Roman Catholic ethos. Again, this points to a reluctance to cover topics which are considered to be 'taboo' to the Roman Catholic way of life.

However, the most serious shortcoming of the ICT syllabus is not the content, but the time dedicated to the subject. The findings show that one lesson a week is not sufficient to cover all the important topics which should be dealt with in ICT. The ICT teachers complained that this one lesson a week is often missed due to school outings or extracurricular activities, and they often struggle to cover the entire syllabus. Although they were talking about the previous syllabus, this does not bode well for the new syllabus, which suffers from the same lack of time dedicated to the teaching of ICT.

In order to teach digital citizenship effectively, one needs to dedicate a certain amount of time to cover topics in some detail. Most digital citizenship topics deal with potentially controversial topics such as cyberbullying, sexting and hate speech. Their controversial nature lies in the fact that they necessarily involve discussing values, which are often contentious. Thus, it is not as simple as explaining a law of science, or a mathematical concept, or a geographical feature. They involve deep discussion with students who might hold different values and opinions. Teachers need to acknowledge the controversial nature of these discussions, and help students think critically about the topics which are being examined, if they are to avoid rendering such discussions superficial.

Although PSCD favours such an approach, since it deals with values and promotes discussion of such values, it is not meant to replace moral education. This is because moral education is not the main focus of PSCD, or, for that matter, Social Studies or ICT. In Maltese secondary schools, moral education is often considered to be the domain of Catholic

Religious Education (CRE), which is considered to be one of the core subjects. In fact, the inclusion of CRE in state curricula is enshrined in Article 2 of the Constitution (Constitution of Malta, 1968). Unfortunately, the secondary school Religious Knowledge syllabus does not mention the digital realm at all. The new Religious Knowledge syllabus, which is based on Catholic Religious Education, focuses on living a Christian way of life. Although there are learning outcomes related to ethics which talk about the "values and moral principles that should be followed by a Christian in their daily lives and choices", (MATSEC, n.d.a, p. 3) there is no mention of how to apply these values and principles to digital spaces. Just like the Social Studies syllabus, when discussing the concept of "community", the syllabus omits any mention of online communities. This is unfortunate, because discussing moral values without any mention of the way that values are applied to online spaces renders the Religious Knowledge syllabus outdated, which is ironic, considering that it is a brand-new syllabus.

The Religious Knowledge syllabus is the only syllabus that the Ministry of Education is not wholly responsible for. The teaching of the Roman Catholic religion in Maltese State schools is regulated by an agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta (1991). This agreement states that the teaching of the Catholic religion must follow the syllabi and methods established by the Maltese Episcopal Conference, which also has the right to develop or select students' textbooks and teachers' guides. This might explain the lack of digital citizenship topics in the Religious Knowledge syllabus. Such topics would probably be deemed to be too controversial in nature and discussing them would go against the Catholic ethos. This suggests both a conceptual and a policy vacuum (Moor, 1985, 2005), since the Religious Knowledge syllabus does not even acknowledge the concept of digitally mediated lives or the influence of technology on moral values.

Although both the agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta and the Constitution of Malta enshrine the teaching of Catholic Religious Education in Maltese State

schools, the Constitution has an opt-out clause (Article 40 (2)), which lets parents decide

whether their children follow these classes (Constitution of Malta, 1968). This provision is

reflected in the National curriculum framework, which states that:

> The parents of children and young people have the right to decide that their child does
>
> not follow Catholic Religious Education. For young people opting out of Catholic
>
> Religious Education, it is recommended that the Religious Education learning area
>
> will consist of an Ethical Education programme, which is preferred over a
>
> Comparative Religious Education programme. The Education Authorities will be
>
> responsible for the development of the programme of study. (Ministry of Education
>
> and Employment, 2012a, p. 36)

Thus, in light of this document, as well as changing demographic trends, a new

subject called 'Ethics' was introduced in 2014. As discussed in the first chapter, parents can

now opt for Ethics over the mainstream Catholic Religious Education. Although both CRE

and Ethics are concerned with moral education, the CRE syllabus aims to teach moral values

through the Roman Catholic religion, while the Ethics syllabus is based on a secular non-

denominational approach.

Religion and Ethics are not optional subjects. Students must choose either one or the

other, since moral education is deemed to be a core requirement in Maltese schools. Both

subjects are concerned with the teaching of moral values, but there is a vast difference

between the two with regards to digital citizenship. Both the Ethics and Religion syllabi have

just been rewritten, but as explained above, the Religion syllabus does not mention

technology or the online world at all. On the other hand, Ethics places a great emphasis on

responsible online behaviour, particularly in year 9. It dedicates quite a stretch of time to the

issue, ensuring that there is enough curriculum time for nuanced conversations about topics

such as hate speech, gaming and social media addictions, the ethics of social media

influencers, online radicalisation, privacy, cyberbullying, sexting, online pornography and revenge porn. In fact, it is the only syllabus which deals with some of these topics. Compared to the other 'core' subjects, it is the one which deals with digital citizenship most adequately. This was also confirmed by the teachers of Ethics, who reported that the amount of time dedicated to digital citizenship topics is sufficient.

However, the main limitation of the Ethics syllabus is that such issues are mostly dealt with in year 9, because the topics tackled in years 10 and 11 (such as life and death issues) do not lend themselves easily to such discussions. Unfortunately, this is also reflected in the PSCD and ICT syllabi, since issues pertaining to digital ethics also feature mostly in year 9. This might explain why some of the participants complained about an overlap between Ethics and PSCD. Another limitation is that since Ethics is a new subject, it is not considered to be mainstream, like Catholic Religious Education, and so, many students miss out on the subject. Furthermore, this subject is not offered in Church schools, since it goes against the religious ethos of such schools, thus almost a third of Maltese students miss out on the option of choosing Ethics. These findings are mostly consistent with those of Barbara (2019), who found that Ethics teachers were satisfied with how the Ethics syllabus tackles topics such as cyberbullying, internet addictions and sexting, but complained about the fact that Ethics is not taken by all students. However, Barbara's findings differed in one important aspect. The research participants in his study, who were all teachers of Ethics, reported that they did not feel fully prepared to teach such topics. This finding did not emerge from this research. There could be two reasons for this. The first reason could be due to the fact that Barbara's research focused only on teachers of Ethics, which meant that his study contained more participants who taught Ethics than this study, and thus the odds of finding participants who did not feel fully prepared to teach such issues were greater. The second reason could be related to the position of the interviewer. As explained earlier, just before the data collection

started, I had been promoted to Ethics Education Officer, which could have influenced the Ethics teachers when answering the questions.

After discussing the syllabi of the core subjects, I will now turn my attention to some of the option subjects which could potentially by conducive to the teaching of digital citizenship. The subjects that I will be discussing are Media Literacy Education, Information Technology, Computing and Social Studies (Option), all of which are considered to be optional subjects, designed to be taken by students who want to specialise in a particular area.

These subjects are very conducive to the teaching of digital citizenship and the awareness of how technology and social media impact our lives; however, the current syllabi leave much to be desired in terms of content. Social Studies (Option), Information Technology and Computing seem to almost skirt ethical issues completely, while Media Literacy Education makes a very poor attempt at tackling them. In the case of Information Technology and Media Literacy Education, this could be due to their status as vocational subjects, which focus on learning by doing, rather than thinking in abstract terms. Vocational Subjects are clearly demarcated from the so-called 'Academic Subjects', in fact, even their assessment is different, with continuous assessment given a weighting of 60 percent of the total mark. This continuous assessment is based on hands-on tasks which are rather practical in nature, such as producing a short film.

Media and information literacy is a domain which is established in many curricula around the world. Although it goes by different names, such as digital media literacy, information literacy or internet literacy, it generally refers to "competencies that emphasize the development of enquiry-based skills and the ability to engage meaningfully with media and information channels in whatever form and technologies they are using" (Wilson, et al., 2011, p.18). Thus, it is usually based on teaching critical thinking, deconstructing the media, assessing the reliability of news and information, and analysing the market forces that shape

the media. Unfortunately, the Maltese Media Literacy Education syllabus does nothing of the sort. It seems to be geared towards teaching students how to produce content that can be used on the media, without giving much thought to a critical analysis of such media and the market forces that shape them. This was confirmed by Dr. Grech, who said that the Media Literacy syllabus does not go far enough in teaching the soft skills which are normally associated with digital citizenship and digital literacy, saying that it was closer to ICT than anything else. He said that a Media Literacy syllabus should incorporate a series of case-studies that encourage critical thinking, but he claimed that this was the opposite of what the Maltese educational system was doing.

Information Technology and Computing, both of which aim to teach about computers and technology, albeit to a different audience (Information Technology is a vocational subject, while Computing is considered to be an academic subject), teach from a purely scientific point of view, without much consideration of ethical issues related to the development or the use of technology. I consider this to be a big shortcoming in both subjects, because the development and use of technology is never neutral, there are always intrinsic values built into it.

Social Studies (Option), which delves deeper in the study of society and citizenship than its statutory counterpart, barely mentions technology and social media, except for a cursory mention of social networking. Indeed, just like Social Studies (General) it does not seem to consider digital citizenship to be a salient part of contemporary citizenship education.

The findings show that although the policy makers show a degree of awareness about the importance of teaching digital citizenship, there is no concerted effort to tackle it holistically in all the three years of secondary school. The syllabi of PSCD, Ethics and ICT are the ones which make the best attempt to tackle digital citizenship; however, there is some degree of overlap between the two subjects, as well as some gaps. For example, none of the

syllabi cover the issue of digital rights, such as the right to access digital technologies, or digital consumer rights. Although the issue of misinformation is dealt with in Ethics to some extent, it is only mentioned in passing, and is not dealt with comprehensively. The only syllabus which emulates Mattson's approach (Mattson, 2021) is Ethics, since it is based on critical discussions on ethical dilemmas and encourages multiple perspectives on each topics. Like Mattson's approach, the methodology used in Ethics gives great importance to ethical thinking and decision making. Although PSCD does this to a certain extent, it is more heavily focused on personal safety. This corresponds to James (2014) conclusions about how schools deal with ethics related to the use of technology. She found that in most cases, schools teach students about avoiding personal risks, rather than teaching about their responsibilities towards others.

It is also clear that most of the content related to digital citizenship is covered in year 9, when students are 13 to 14 years old. Although this is certainly an appropriate age during which to discuss such issues, the content should be spread out over the whole secondary school. This would avoid an abundance of information in year 9 and an almost total lack of information in years 10 and 11.

Theme 3: The Role of Schools and the Challenges in Teaching Digital Citizenship

The third theme that emerged from this research question focuses on the role of schools in teaching digital citizenship, as well as the challenges faced by educators. All the participants stated that the teaching of digital citizenship in schools is important, with some participants describing it as "critical", adding that schools have the responsibility to impart the knowledge, skills and values that students need to become good digital citizens. Prof. Wain, Mr. Saliba and Mr. Gatt extended this responsibility to teaching digital citizenship to the students' parents. Mr. Spiteri, in particular, remarked that some parents often act

unethically on social media and acted as bad role-models for their offspring. However, it must be noted that most parents of secondary school students were not brought up in the digital era, so they were not educated in how to use digital technologies responsibly. Some of the participants, such as Mr. Gatt, Mr. Chircop and Ms. Garcia Imbernon emphasised the need to teach students that the kind of behaviour that is expected of them in offline settings should be extended to digital spaces.

Although some of the participants reported challenges in teaching students about the ethical use of technology and social media, they did not talk about such challenges at length. The main concern of the participants was the constant new developments in the field of technology, which means that educators who are not avid users of technology are always one step (or two) behind. Two of the participants suggested that some older educators are "technophobic", or afraid and reluctant to keep up with technology and social media. One of the participants, Mr. Saliba, observed that it is not enough for educators to merely keep up with technology, they must always try to predict how technologies will evolve in order to help their students acquire the relevant skills and attitudes which will be required in the future.

This concern is certainly warranted, because the nature of technology necessitates that syllabi that contain digital citizenship topics are constantly updated. Furthermore, unless teachers, school leaders and policy makers are aware of the issues that arise from students' unethical use technology and social media, they cannot prepare them for dealing with such issues. In their national report which focused on the findings from the EU Kids Online research, Lauri & Farrugia observed that "the mediation of internet by teachers is still low and remains restrictive rather than enabling" (Lauri & Farrugia, 2020, p. 38). This research shows that only 21% of 13 to 14-year olds received help from school when they were bothered by something that they had seen online and only 33% of the same age group had

been involved in a discussion with their teachers about what they could potentially do if they were ever bothered by anything that they saw on the internet. These statistics reflect the concern of the participants who were interviewed for my study. Although the participants did not have the statistics to back up their observations, their lived experiences in schools have alerted them to the fact that many educators seem to be out of touch with the students' online lives.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

The interviews with the participants were all conducted between January and July of 2019, when no one could predict the huge effect that COVID-19 pandemic would have on compulsory education and family life. In March of 2020, all schools in Malta were abruptly shut down for the foreseeable future, at least until the end of September 2020, which marked the beginning of the next scholastic year. All teachers had to suddenly switch to remote teaching, using a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous online methods of teaching. Instead of technology being an aid to education, technology became the only vehicle for education, and the concerns about inattention and the risks of using technology were largely overridden by the sheer necessity of using digital technologies to reach students who suddenly became confined to their houses.

The role of parental mediation in the use of technology has also been transformed. Some parents have lost their jobs or have had to deal with finding a balance between working from home and 'home-schooling' their children. Others have had to continue working while their children are at home. This has meant that the notion of limiting screen-time has now become almost totally redundant. During the lockdowns, children and youths needed access to digital devices and the internet to be able to continue their education and to keep in touch with their friends and extended families. In order to ensure that all children had access to

education, the government made arrangements to provide children from poorer households with laptops or tablets and a year of free internet access (Sansone, 2020) but of course, this did not ensure a level playing field. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic served to widen the gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Children who had access to faster internet at home, reliable devices, a home environment that was conducive to learning and above all, parents who could help them harness the benefits of technology to enhance their learning had a considerable advantage over those who did not have access to all this. Children who come from disadvantaged households are more at risk of falling prey to the harms enabled by the use of technology. As the findings from this study show, children whose parents are not present and are not so adept at using digital technologies are more prone to spending longer spans of unsupervised time on digital devices, perhaps putting them at greater risk of cyberbullying, digital abuse and exploitation.

Thus, the timing of this study has resulted in one of its main limitations, since some of the conversations about children's use of technology seem to be rather anachronistic now. The COVID-19 pandemic has made a compelling case for new research on how children and youths use digital technologies, since it has transformed the role of schools, parents and educators. Further research on how students use digital technologies, as well as the risks and benefits of introducing the BYOD policy in Maltese schools is required.

Another important limitation of this study, which was discussed in the introduction, lies in the fact that the data related to the first research question do not come directly from youths themselves, and consequently risks denying them a voice, and instead relies on the second-hand information from their teachers, experts and policy makers in education. The findings show that these participants do not have a very clear idea of the extent to which these issues affect Maltese secondary school students, or how they deal with them. Although most of the participants were very much concerned about cyberbullying among secondary

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school students, they did not seem to know much about how youths deal with issues such as sexting, revenge porn, online pornography, hate speech, extremism and online radicalisation. After talking to the participants, I realised that conversations about such topics rarely take place in Maltese schools. As explained earlier, this is probably due to the fact that these issues are still considered to be taboo in Maltese society, and the students might be ashamed of admitting to engaging in such activities, or being a victim of them. In fact, it is notoriously difficult to obtain ethical clearance to engage children in research about such topics. It was made clear to me by other Maltese researchers and educators that it was practically impossible to get institutional access to students for the purposes of research about such topics. Hence, this research would ideally be complemented by further research which includes the participation of youths, which would give them a voice and provide them with an opportunity to contribute to research about their experiences with the use of digital technologies and new media.

Another limitation of the study lies in my role as Education Officer of Ethics. Since Ethics is a relatively new subject, when I started my research, there was no Education Officer for Ethics. In fact, the subject had barely started being taught in schools, and my promotion occurred half-way through the research study. Thus, although I could interview the Education Officers of other subjects, I obviously could not interview myself. However, I dealt with this limitation by interviewing Prof. Kenneth Wain, who wrote the first Ethics syllabus and formed part of a group of academics who are responsible for the training of teachers of Ethics. Professor Wain has been involved in the teaching of Ethics in Maltese schools right from the start, and was thus the natural choice. Apart from this obvious limitation, my role as Education Officer also exposes me to the potential criticism of emotional involvement and bias. Thus, as explained earlier, I had to be very careful to remain as detached and objective as possible at all stages of the research. However, it must

be noted that my insider status also had its advantages, since it helped me gain access to the participants, and to understand the context in which the research was taking place. Familiarity with documents such as the National Minimum Curriculum and the subject syllabi also helped me map the strengths and weaknesses of each document.

Other limitations include the small number of teachers interviewed and the fact that most of the syllabi are brand new and thus teachers might not have been familiar with them at the time of data collection. As I have explained earlier, most secondary school syllabi were rewritten between 2019 and 2020, since they were due to be implemented in September 2020 (although their implementation has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Thus, I thought that it would be better to focus on the policy makers who were more familiar with the new syllabi, since the issues related to digital citizenship were more likely to be in the new syllabi than in the previous ones. However, further research with teachers would help investigate whether the new syllabi, which started being implemented in September 2022, will be effective at teaching digital citizenship.

One must also point out that the data collected for this study were self-reported and reflect the perspectives of the participants. Although I have made every effort to choose a wide sample of participants, and to choose participants who are considered to be experts in their areas, one cannot assume that the perspectives of these participants are the same as those of all the teachers, heads of schools, experts and policy makers in Malta. Finally, given that this is a case-study, the findings are not transferable to contexts beyond Maltese secondary schools.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Recommendation 1: Providing Alternatives for Young People

The findings show that the participants were concerned about excessive digital technology use by Maltese youths. One potential reason for this is that the use of technology and new media is replacing important activities such as sports and other hobbies, such as reading.   Thus, the state should encourage participation in sports and other hobbies by making it easier for children to engage in such activities. As the National Policy for Sports in Malta and Gozo (The Parliamentary Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, 2016) suggests, sports should be given more recognition by increasing the number of Physical Education lessons during school hours, which are currently below the EU average, and engaging more sports personnel in order to improve participation and standards in sports. I propose that school premises, most of which become vacant at the end of the school day (around 14:30), should be used to provide a space for extra-curricular activities such as sports, art, social clubs, and so on, which should be offered free of charge or at heavily subsidised rates. Thus, teenagers can opt to stay on after school and participate in organised activities without having to pay exorbitant amounts of money to private clubs. In fact, this is what happens in some Independent (private) schools in Malta, and I believe that it should be extended to State and Church schools.

It is also important to change the culture around sports and other hobbies, which are often perceived as a hindrance to academic achievement. This could be achieved via a national campaign, with special emphasis on educators and parents. Many teachers and parents still consider the professions to be the best route to lifelong employment and achievement, so they often fail to promote art, music or sport activities as a worthwhile pursuit. Other suggestions would include creating safe spaces where teenagers, children and families can spend time together, or just hang out. As explained earlier, Malta is very

densely populated, and over the past few years, there has been a gradual urbanisation of the towns and villages, with a trend toward privatisation of public spaces. In fact, it is by far the most built-up nation in Europe, with buildings covering almost a quarter of the surface area (Eurostat, 2018). I suggest that this trend should be reversed, so that young people can experience being physically together in safe outdoor environments. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the necessity of outdoor spaces for the health and wellbeing of citizens. This is especially the case for children and youths, for whom social interaction is key to development.

Although the state promotes reading for pleasure in various ways, such as through the National Literacy Agency, getting teenagers to read is an uphill battle. The use of community-based and school-based lending libraries should be encouraged, and policy makers should consider subsidising books for school-age children and youths. Although there have been efforts to promote reading, I think that such efforts need to be strengthened. I suggest that efforts should be aimed at reading for fun, rather than presenting reading as a chore, because that would surely be counterproductive.

Recommendation 2: Tackling Internet and Gaming Addictions among Young People

The findings show that some of the participants felt that some students were addicted to technology. Thus, it has become more necessary than ever before for the state to enact policies to deal with such issues. I suggest that this should be tackled on two fronts – education and mental health provision. First of all, all policy makers and educators should be made aware of the importance of tackling addictions. Although most of the professionals who deal with school-age children are aware of the risks of drug and alcohol addictions and have Standard Operating Procedures to turn to when a potential case is flagged, internet and gaming addictions are still relatively unknown. Thus, the first thing that should be done is to

commission further studies on Maltese students' problematic use of the internet, and then, based on that data, provide targeted mental health services in schools and the community. The state should also provide training to all educators on the issue. This training would serve two purposes. The first is for all educators, who, in their safeguarding role, are often the first professionals to notice when something is amiss with their students, to be able to spot and flag any cases which might be problematic. The second purpose of such training is for Education Officers and other policy makers to include knowledge about internet and gaming addictions in the curriculum and to provide students with the knowledge and the skills to be able to recognise the signs of addiction and access the necessary provisions for beating addictions. Furthermore, there should also be targeted campaigns aimed at parents to make them aware of the issue, and to help them spot the warning signs in their children. However, care must be taken not to turn this into a moral panic, since that would surely backfire.

Recommendation 3: Closing the Digital Gap

Many of the participants indicated that some parents do not have the necessary skills to support their children with making the best of technology. Thus, the state should map out the skills gap between the digitally literate and those who are not so digitally literate and provide opportunities for filling this gap. Such interventions could be targeted at families who are at risk of slipping through the cracks and explore ways of reaching them, such as through traditional media such as radio and television, or by enlisting the help of social workers who deal with vulnerable members of society. Such families should be provided with training in media literacy, digital skills and digital citizenship. This training could be community-based, or better still, provided by schools after school hours, both for the children and for their parents or carers, to help them support their children better.

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Recommendation 4: Tackling Mental Health Issues

The participants in this study suggested that social media is making teenagers more anxious by bombarding them with unrealistic ideals. Thus, the Maltese educational system and mental health provision should address this gap. Students should be taught how to deconstruct the messages that they receive via social media and become more aware of the effect such messages have on them. Such topics should become an integral of the national curriculum, and teachers and other practitioners who work with youths should be on the lookout for signs which can signify that students are struggling with anxiety, self-esteem issues and so on. As discussed earlier, one of the reasons why Maltese students are so obsessed with social media could be the lack of organised activities for them, as well as lack of safe spaces for them to spend some unstructured time together. Thus, the state should invest in more opportunities for youths to become more involved in sports, drama, music, or any other social activity which would allow them to physically interact with each other in safe spaces. It is to be hoped that such activities would promote a healthy engagement between Maltese youths, and hopefully reduce the over-reliance on interaction via social media.

Recommendation 5: School Policies to Deal with Unethical Uses of Technology

The participants indicated that cyberbullying has become a serious issue in Maltese secondary schools, and that they often struggle to deal with it. Thus, schools should work on an anti-bullying policy which clearly specifies what constitutes cyberbullying, and the consequences of engaging in such acts. Such a policy would need to be updated on a regular basis in order to account or new technologies, or new ways in which students bully or harass each other. This policy should also specify the support that victims of bullying have access to. I think that all schools should have a strong psycho-social team, the aim of which would

be to provide support for students who are being bullied, and empower them to speak up about the bullying. This team, along with members of the Senior Leadership Team and all educators who come in contact with young people, should receive specific training on how to deal with such issues. This could be part of their Continuous Professional Development. Such training would need to be ongoing, because cyberbullying is facilitated by digital technologies, which are constantly changing. Thus, the way that students bully and harass each other online might change significantly from one year to the other.

For example, as discussed earlier, one significant change that has occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the introduction of Microsoft Teams across all schools. This has the potential to introduce a new aspect to cyberbullying, since schools now have the capability to investigate cases of cyberbullying by accessing the students' Microsoft Teams accounts. I suggest that there should be better links between Maltese schools and law-enforcement agencies in order to investigate serious cases of cyberbullying. Even if the bullying does not happen within school grounds, teachers and educators are duty-bound to report any suspicion of harm in relation to a child. Thus, I suggest that the state publishes clear guidelines, or Standard Operating Procedures, for all educators working in schools. These guidelines should aim towards a zero-tolerance policy to cyberbullying and would complement the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act (2020).

However, although I believe that a zero-tolerance policy to cyberbullying is important, the intention behind such a policy should not be to criminalise perpetrators, but to protect victims. Therefore, I suggest that schools should first and foremost try to discourage bullying and cyberbullying from happening in the first place by providing a robust system for education against bullying, both through the formal curriculum and through extra-curricular activities. The objective behind this would be to shine a spotlight on bullying in order to promote awareness and teach students why it is wrong and make them aware of the potential

negative effects it has on victims, as well as the consequences for perpetrators. The formal curriculum can be complemented by a whole-school approach, which could include morning assemblies, collaboration with other schools while working on projects related to cyberbullying, drama activities, student production of educational video clips, and so on and so forth.

Most of the above also applies to other behaviour such as sexting, revenge porn and online pornography. Although such issues might not be as pressing as cyberbullying, it is important to formulate policies for educators who are faced with such issues among secondary school children. This would be particularly important when digital devices are introduced in secondary schools. All of these issues can be part of a general BYOD policy, or they can be stand-alone policies which cover unethical behaviour among secondary school children.

Recommendation 6: Avoiding Radicalisation among Maltese Youths

Since one of the risk factors for the radicalisation of youths is marginalisation (Weimann, 2016), it is imperative for our educational system to focus on the inclusion of each and every child. The school curriculum, as well as extra-curricular practices such as celebration of religious and cultural feasts, should be as inclusive as possible. As explained earlier, Maltese schools have become rather multicultural, however, since this has happened quite rapidly, it has taken some people by surprise. Thus, school leaders and policy makers must make sure that students from minority backgrounds feel respected and included in all aspects of society and schooling, in order to reduce the disadvantages that some of them might face (such as language barriers, attainment gaps, cultural differences, marginalised status, less disposable income and so on). However, one must also ensure that all types of marginalisation are addressed. For example, one must be on the lookout for students who do

not come from minority backgrounds, but are marginalised in different ways (due to poverty, mental health problems or other family issues). These students might feel abandoned and resent the fact that students coming from migrant backgrounds seem to be better off than them, resulting in tensions between marginalised Maltese youths and youths coming from migrant backgrounds. Thus, educators must make sure that they do not perpetuate inequalities, either through the curriculum or through the 'hidden' curriculum, that is, the unofficial and often unintended norms, values and beliefs that are taught in schools. These could include, among others, the use of stereotypes in teaching resources, school rules regarding school uniforms and school lunches, as well as school practices such as morning prayers, the teaching of values and so on.

Teachers, school leaders and members of the psycho-social team should be on the lookout for students who are struggling, or who are showing worrying signs, either of being the victims or perpetrators of hate speech or online extremism. This would require particular training, which is not yet currently offered in Maltese schools. Teachers should also be trained on how respond to diversity in schools. Although some teachers have had some kind of training, especially those who are newly qualified, this kind of training should be ongoing, as part of teachers' Continuous Professional Development. This training would also address the need to flag potential cases of radicalisation. At this point in time, there is no Standard Operating Procedure for teachers and school leaders to follow if they have a reasonable suspicion that students are becoming radicalised. Finally, schools should have zero-tolerance policies to racism and discrimination in schools. In spite of the fact that Maltese schools have a policy on inclusive education (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2019) in place, the policy is more geared towards inclusion for children with disabilities than towards other types of inclusion.

Recommendation 7: Introducing Digital Citizenship as a Stand-alone Statutory Subject

The findings from this research have shown that the current cross-curricular provision of digital citizenship is far from ideal. Thus, one of the recommendations is for a new statutory subject called 'Digital Citizenship' to be introduced in Maltese secondary schools. The aim of this subject would be to prepare students for their role as global citizens, and to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and values to thrive and respect one another in a connected, digital world. This subject would be based on the core values of critical thinking, democratic values and active student participation. It would include topics related to critical media literacy, such as distinguishing between news, propaganda and misinformation. It would also aim to cultivate empathy in students, which is an important strategy for tackling issues such as cyberbullying and hate speech.

Empathy plays an important role in the functioning of society by encouraging people to share their experiences, needs and desires. Understanding people's motivations, experiences and emotions and differentiating them from our own enables us to live more peacefully with one another. Although it is easier for people to empathise with members of their in-group, people can learn to empathise with others who are not part of the group. In fact, one of the aims of education is that of teaching students how to live in harmony with others.   Thus, this new subject would aim to foster a sense of empathy towards others, as well as critical thinking skills, which would help students evaluate their own thinking and decide whether it is sound, rational and unbiased. Empathy and critical thinking skills go hand in hand. Reduced empathy dehumanises others and makes it easier for us to deny them their rights, disrespect them, or even abuse them. Without critical thinking, our biases and beliefs are constantly reinforced, and we become more reliant on the people, media and environments that contribute to this reinforcement. Thus, empathy and critical thinking help us consider situation from multiple perspectives, and to proverbially 'put ourselves in

people's shoes'. This helps to bridge the 'us' and 'them' mentality by making us consider things from their perspectives. This kind of education also helps to avoid polarisation and extremism. Thus, one of the goals of this subject would be to promote the values of mutual understanding, tolerance and diversity, as well as equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to assess information, thinking critically about its sources, credibility and value. Nowadays, this has become an essential skill which helps young people deal with information and narratives that could potentially pose a threat to democracy and promote divisive views.

This subject would also include topics related to the intersection between sexual relationships and technology, which would help students understand the wider issues around sexting, revenge porn and pornography. It would also include some discussions on the relationship between gaming and gambling via loot boxes, the effects of technology on attention and the dangers of problematic internet use. These lessons must not be a result of moral panic, or verge into scaremongering. Instead, they should be based on discussions with students, which can help them make sense of these issues and reflect on how to use digital technologies more ethically and how to keep themselves and others safe from harm. It is important to acknowledge the fact that teenagers need to spend a certain amount of time online, and that there are healthy ways of engaging in online activities.

This subject should aim towards a more holistic understanding of ethical issues related to technology, applying ethical thinking and critical thinking skills to topical issues. It should aim to be more like Mattson's curriculum than Ribble's, in the sense that topics should not be presented as black and white issues, but it should clearly acknowledge ethical dilemmas and multiple perspectives on each topic. The approach should be heavily based on class discussions, giving importance to thought-provoking questions, ethical thinking and decision making.

Summary of the Research Study

The findings related to the first research question focus on the participants'

perceptions of the issues that arise from students' unethical use of technology and new media

and how these issues impinge on the lives of secondary school students at school. The first

theme dealt with the ubiquitous nature of technology and problematic internet use. The

findings show that most of the participants were concerned about Maltese secondary school

students' excessive use of technology and new media, claiming that this has a negative

impact on their wellbeing and led to considerable difficulties at school. Many of the

participants indicated that parents and caregivers do not provide students with the necessary

supervision and education about how to make ethical use of technologies and new media.

The second theme focused on students' identity development on social media. Although only

a few participants commented on this issue, they were concerned that students give excessive

importance to their social media image, which can often lead to conflicts with peers, both at

school and outside of school. This led to the third theme, which focused on the impact of

digital technology on students' empathy and cyberbullying. The findings showed clearly that

the participants were very worried about cyberbullying and its knock-on effects on peer

relationships. The participants who worked in Maltese secondary schools, either as heads of

schools or teachers, agreed that the rise in cyberbullying has proven to be rather problematic

for the running of schools, citing a lack of clear guidelines. Finally, the fourth theme dealt

with other internet harms such as sexting, revenge porn, pornography, online hate speech and

extremism. Unlike cyberbullying, these internet harms did not seem to be at the forefront of

the participants' concerns; in fact, it seemed clear that there were no specific school policies

to deal with such issues.

The findings from the interviews which relate to the second research question show

that school policies regarding the ethical use of the internet and digital devices are almost

non-existent, and cases are often dealt with on an ad-hoc basis. Many of the participants were concerned about cyberbullying, and reported that dealing with cyberbullying has become problematic for schools and that there were no specific school policies which deal with the intricacies of cyberbullying. It was also established that there were no policies to tackle other issues such as sexting, revenge porn, online pornography, extremism and radicalisation. This is not surprising, given the lack of a BYOD policy in schools. Since Maltese secondary schools ban all personal devices in schools, there has never been a need to introduce a BYOD policy, so any unethical behaviour which results from the use of such devices, such as cyberbullying, is often assumed to be something that parents should be dealing with, not the school. However, the line between 'home' and 'school' has become rather blurred, and teachers and educators are struggling with conceptual and policy vacuums. One of the interesting findings that emerged from this research was the lack of strategy for digital education. Although the Department for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills has been working on this strategy for several years, it has not yet been published.

The findings that relate to the third research question show that all of the participants felt that schools have a responsibility to teach digital citizenship. However, there does not seem to be anyone who is directly responsible for a digital citizenship syllabus, and digital citizenship topics are spread between PSCD, Ethics, ICT and Media Literacy. Although many of the participants talked about extra-curricular and cross-curricular activities, the participants who worked directly in schools, especially those in teaching roles, often failed to mention these activities. This indicates a dissonance between what the policy makers thought that these activities were achieving, and the real impact in schools.

The findings show that PSCD and Ethics are the curricular subjects that mostly deal with digital citizenship topics. Other subjects, such as ICT, and Media Literacy Education, also make an attempt to do so, but in a much more limited manner. On the other hand,

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subjects like Social Studies, Religion, Information Technology and Computing fail to engage with digital citizenship in a satisfactory manner. The reasons for this are various, but they are mostly related to the limited teaching time in secondary schools. This is further complicated by the fact that only PSCD and ICT are statutory subjects, Ethics and Media Literacy Education are still considered to be 'fringe' subjects. This effectively means that the digital literacy learning outcomes are not being tackled effectively, and that the cross-curricular approach is not satisfactory. This was reflected in the participants' responses to questions about the curriculum. Although the participants' comments about the role of the curriculum in tackling digital citizenship in Maltese secondary schools were largely positive, many of them reported that a lack of teaching time to tackle such topics effectively was a major issue. A close inspection of the different syllabi showed that digital citizenship topics compete with other topics in the different curricula, and in fact, very little teaching time is dedicated to such topics.

Another finding that emerged was that many of the participants highlighted challenges in teaching digital citizenship. One of these challenges was teachers' lack of skills in teaching digital citizenship, especially since digital technologies develop at such a rapid pace. The other challenge concerned educators' use of social media, and their role in modelling the responsible use of social media for their students. The two participants who spoke about this had totally opposing views, highlighting the contentious issue of teachers' right to freedom of speech and to enjoy their private life, while at the same time acting as role models for students.

These findings can make a useful contribution to the area of teaching digital citizenship, the teaching of curricular subjects such as Ethics and PSCD, and Media Literacy, particularly in Maltese contexts. This study emphasises the need to understand how youths use digital technologies in their day-to-day lives, in order to be able to draft effective policies

and syllabi which deal with the teaching of digital citizenship. The findings of this study highlight the need for more research into the ethical use of technology and new media, especially research which focuses on the voices of young people.

Concluding Thoughts

The aim of this study was to explore an under-researched topic, that is, how Maltese secondary schools promote the ethical use of technology. This study has provided significant insights into the perspectives of policy makers, experts and educators regarding the role of schools in promoting digital citizenship. The findings show that although the participants were concerned with Maltese students' unethical uses of digital technologies, the educational system does not yet adequately equip students to navigate ethical issues in digital spaces. The findings suggest a conceptual vacuum in the curriculum; as well as a policy vacuum, reflected in the lack of policies which deal with such issues. It is to be hoped that this research will serve as a catalyst for change.

It is quite clear that digital technologies and new media have an essential role to play in the lives of youths. Avoiding the use of such technologies would be useless and counterproductive, simply because there is no way that we can turn back the clock to an earlier era in which technology played a less important role, even if we thought that it would be a good idea to do so. In fact, recent developments have shown that technology is set to have a more central role in our lives, so it is essential for researchers, educators and policy makers to understand how children and adolescents can be taught to harness the benefits of technology while reducing the potential harms.

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Appendix 1: The Information Sheets and the Consent Forms for the Study

Information Sheets

Participant Information Sheet for Heads of Schools
UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: _____

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools

Department: EPS

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Ms. Lucianne Zammit

███████████████████████████████
█████████████

Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This interview will be part of the information gathered for a Ph.D. dissertation authored by Ms. Lucianne Zammit, a student at the IoE/UCL. The dissertation is called *Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools* and it aims to investigate how the teaching of cyberethics in Maltese secondary schools can help to address the moral issues that students face when navigating cyberspace.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen due to the fact that you are a Head of a secondary state school. Around three other Heads of Schools will be approached to take part in this research.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and ask for your data to be destroyed.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to participate in a face to face semi-structured interview, which will take place at your preferred location. Unfortunately, your travel expensed cannot be reimbursed. Each interview will take approximately one hour and will be tape-recorded. The data will be analysed during and after the research and the findings will be made accessible for your comments and feedback, which will then be incorporated into the final written document. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, terminate the interview at any point time and withdraw your data from the research. You will be asked to sign a consent form and asked whether you would like to be contacted for future research.

Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your interview will be used only for critical analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The interviews will take an hour of your time. No other disadvantages and risks are envisaged, except if evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases, the researcher may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shed some light on the teaching of cyberethics in Maltese state secondary schools.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any complaints regarding your treatment by the researcher or you need to report something serious occurring during or following your participation in the project, you can contact Prof. John Vorhaus, the Principal Supervisor ███████████). Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee ███████████

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

The personal information gathered will include your name, occupation, and your views on the teaching of cyberethics in Malta. You can choose to remain anonymous, or choose to have the information that you have passed on attributed to you. The data will be securely stored on an encrypted USB external drive and backed up on a password-encrypted laptop and all hard copy data will be stored in a locked drawer at the University of Malta. The data will not be shared with anyone else.

Limits to confidentiality

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data collected during this research will be analysed and presented in a PhD thesis, and will also be used in published articles and conference presentations. All the data and records will be kept for five years following the publication of documents resulting from data generation and then securely destroyed. The data will not be shared with any other researcher.

Participant Information Sheet for Key Policy Makers
UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: **Z6364106/2018/09/36**

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools

Department: EPS

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Ms. Lucianne Zammit

Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This interview will be part of the information gathered for a Ph.D. dissertation authored by Ms. Lucianne Zammit, a student at the IoE/UCL. The dissertation is called *Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools* and it aims to investigate how the teaching of cyberethics in Maltese secondary schools can help to address the moral issues that students face when navigating cyberspace.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen due to the fact that you are a key policy maker in Maltese education. Around six other policy makers will be approached to take part in this research.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and ask for your data to be destroyed.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to participate in a face to face semi-structured interview, which will take place at your preferred location. Unfortunately, your travel expensed cannot be reimbursed. Each interview will take approximately one hour and will be tape-recorded. The data will be analysed during and after the research and the findings will be made accessible for your comments and feedback, which will then be incorporated into the final written document. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, terminate the interview at any point time and withdraw your data from the research. You will be asked to sign a consent form and asked whether you would like to be contacted for future research.

Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your interview will be used only for critical analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The interviews will take an hour of your time. No other disadvantages and risks are envisaged, except if evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases, the researcher may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shed some light on the teaching of cyberethics in Maltese state secondary schools.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any complaints regarding your treatment by the researcher or you need to report something serious occurring during or following your participation in the project, you can contact Prof. John Vorhaus, the Principal Supervisor ███████████████). Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (██████████████).

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

The personal information gathered will include your name, occupation, and your views on the teaching of cyberethics in Malta. You can choose to remain anonymous, or choose to have the information that you have passed on attributed to you. The data will be securely stored on an encrypted USB external drive and backed up on a password-encrypted laptop and all hard copy data will be stored in a locked drawer at the University of Malta. The data will not be shared with anyone else.

Limits to confidentiality

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data collected during this research will be analysed and presented in a PhD thesis, and will also be used in published articles and conference presentations. All the data and records will be kept for five years following the publication of documents resulting from data generation and then securely destroyed. The data will not be shared with any other researcher.

Participant Information Sheet for Teachers

UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: **Z6364106/2018/09/36**

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools

Department: EPS

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Ms. Lucianne Zammit

Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Feel free to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This interview will be part of the information gathered for a Ph.D. dissertation authored by Ms. Lucianne Zammit, a student at the IoE/UCL. The dissertation is called *Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools* and it aims to investigate how the teaching of cyberethics in Maltese secondary schools can help to address the moral issues that students face when navigating cyberspace.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen due to the fact that you are a teacher who teaches Ethics, Religion, PSCD, Social Studies or ICT in Maltese state secondary schools. Around five other teachers will be approached to take part in this research. Teachers who teach in the primary or middle sector and teachers who teach in Independent and Church schools will not be approached.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and ask for your data to be destroyed.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to participate in a face to face semi-structured interview, which will take place at your preferred location. Unfortunately, your travel expensed cannot be reimbursed. Each interview will take approximately one hour and will be tape-recorded. The data will be analysed during and after the research and the findings will be made accessible for your comments and feedback, which will then be incorporated into the final written document. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, terminate the interview at any point time and withdraw your data from the research. You will be asked to sign a consent form and asked whether you would like to be contacted for future research.

Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your interview will be used only for critical analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The interviews will take an hour of your time. No other disadvantages and risks are envisaged, except if evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases, the researcher may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shed some light on the teaching of cyberethics in Maltese state secondary schools.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any complaints regarding your treatment by the researcher or you need to report something serious occurring during or following your participation in the project, you can contact Prof. John Vorhaus, the Principal Supervisor (███████████████). Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (███████████).

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

The personal information gathered will include your name, occupation, and your views on the teaching of cyberethics in Malta. However, in the final dissertation report, all efforts will be made to anonymise your data. The data will be securely stored on an encrypted USB external drive and backed up on a password-encrypted laptop and all hard copy data will be stored in a locked drawer at the University of Malta. The data will not be shared with anyone else.

Limits to confidentiality

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data collected during this research will be analysed and presented in a PhD thesis, and will also be used in published articles and conference presentations. All the data and records will be kept for five years following the publication of documents resulting from data generation and then securely destroyed. The data will not be shared with any other researcher.

Consent Forms

CONSENT FORM FOR HEADS OF SCHOOLS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools

Department: EPS

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Ms. Lucianne Zammit

█████████████████████████████████

████████████████████████

Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer:

██████████████████████████

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee
Project ID number: Z6364106/2018/09/36

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in a face to face interview.	
2	I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information (name, occupation and my views on the teaching of Cyberethics) will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	
3	I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the researcher might be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.	
4	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University and to the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme (MGSS) for monitoring and audit purposes.	
5	I understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
6	I understand that no promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage me to participate.	
7	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking this study.	
8	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
9	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
10	I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within five years following the publication of documents resulting from data generation.	
11	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
12	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	

If you would like your contact details to be retained so that you can be contacted in the future by UCL researchers who would like to invite you to participate in follow up studies to this project, or in future studies of a similar nature, please tick the appropriate box below.

	Yes, I would be happy to be contacted in this way	
	No, I would not like to be contacted	

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

CONSENT FORM FOR KEY POLICY MAKERS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools

Department: EPS

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:

Ms. Lucianne Zammit

Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer:

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee

Project ID number: Z6364106/2018/09/36

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in a face to face interview.	
2	I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information (name, occupation and my views on the teaching of cyberethics) will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	
3	Anonymity is optional for this research. Please select from the following 3 options: (a) I agree for my real name and role/affiliation to be used in connection with any words I have said or information I have passed on. (b) I request that my comments are presented anonymously but give permission to connect my role/affiliation with my comments (but not the title of my position). (c) I request that my comments are presented anonymously with no mention of my role/affiliation. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the researcher may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.	
4	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University and to the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme (MGSS) for monitoring and audit purposes.	
5	I understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
6	I understand that no promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage me to participate.	
7	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking this study.	
8	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	

9	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
10	I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within five years following the publication of documents resulting from data generation.	
11	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
12	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	

If you would like your contact details to be retained so that you can be contacted in the future by UCL researchers who would like to invite you to participate in follow up studies to this project, or in future studies of a similar nature, please tick the appropriate box below.

	Yes, I would be happy to be contacted in this way	
	No, I would not like to be contacted	

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Teaching Ethics in the Age of Technology: Promoting the Responsible Use of Technology in Maltese Secondary Schools

Department: EPS

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Ms. Lucianne Zammit

Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer:

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: Z6364106/2018/09/36

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in a face to face interview.	
2.	I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information (name, occupation and my views on the teaching of Cyberethics) will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	
3.	I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the researcher might be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.	
4.	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University and to the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme (MGSS) for monitoring and audit purposes.	
5.	I understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
6.	I understand that no promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage me to participate.	
7.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking this study.	
8.	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
9.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
10.	I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within five years following the publication of documents resulting from data generation.	
11.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
12.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	

If you would like your contact details to be retained so that you can be contacted in the future by UCL researchers who would like to invite you to participate in follow up studies to this project, or in future studies of a similar nature, please tick the appropriate box below.

	Yes, I would be happy to be contacted in this way	
	No, I would not like to be contacted	

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix 2: Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule 1: Heads/Assistant Heads of School

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- In your experience, are there any differences between the experiences of males and female youths with regards to online behaviour?

- Do you think that teaching about digital citizenship is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- How do you promote ethical online behaviour in your school?

- Which curricular subjects tackle this topic?

- Do you think that the current curriculum tackles this topic effectively?

- Do you give teachers any particular training? Can you elaborate on this?

- Are there any particular issues that you think need to be tackled?

- Do you think that enough is being done in this regard?

- Do you have any suggestions for better practice?

Interview Schedule 2: Teachers

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- In your experience, are there any differences between the experiences of male and female youths with regards to online behaviour?

- Do you think that teaching about digital citizenship is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- How does the school that you teach in promote ethical online behaviour?

- Which curricular subjects tackle this topic?

- Which subject/s do you teach?

- How does this subject deal with this topic?

- Do you think that the current curriculum tackles this topic effectively?

- Are there any cross-curricular or extra-curricular activities that promote ethical online behaviour that take place in the school that you teach in?

- Which issues do you think are particularly pressing?

- Do you think that enough is being done in this regard?

- Do you have any suggestions for better practice?

Interview Schedule 3: Hon. Evarist Bartolo

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- You have often mentioned "Learning to live together" as one of the main pillars of education. Why do you place such emphasis on this?

- Do you think that teaching about digital citizenship is important in today's world? Why/Why not?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship - parents or schools?

- Do you think that that new curricula, such as Ethics and the revamped ICT curriculum, help to promote ethical behaviour online?

- Is there a national strategy for the teaching of digital citizenship?

- If yes, how was this strategy developed? Was it based on any research? What kind of funding is allocated to it?

- How do you think that schools should deal with issues pertaining to digital citizenship?

Interview Schedule 4: Mr. Stephen Cachia

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- Do you think that teaching about digital citizenship is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- Is there a national strategy for the teaching of digital citizenship?

- If yes, how was this strategy developed? Was it based on any research?

- Which are the curricular subjects that deal with digital citizenship?

- Are you aware of any other cross-curricular initiatives that aim to teach digital citizenship?

Interview Schedule 5: Mr. Grazio Grixti

- To what extent do digital technologies affect the lives of young people nowadays?

- In your experience, are there any differences between the experiences of males and female youths with regards to online behaviour?

- Do you think that teaching about digital citizenship is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- Can you give me some information regarding Malta's digital education policy?

- How does the Directorate help schools promote ethical online behaviour?

- Do you think that enough is being done in this regard?

- In your opinion, what is the most pressing issue that should be tackled?

- In your opinion, how should schools tackle digital citizenship?

- In your opinion, which curricular subjects are best suited to teach digital citizenship?

- If you were to design a curriculum for teaching digital citizenship in secondary schools, what would it look like?

Interview Schedule 6: Mr. Stephen Camilleri

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- Do you think that teaching children how to behave ethically online is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- Are you aware of any worrying trends that you think should be addressed by schools?

- Do you think that educators are doing enough to promote ethical behaviour online?

- In your opinion, how can educators improve their practices in this regard?

- How do the Secondary (years 9 – 11) PSCD syllabi deal with digital citizenship? (Which topics are covered?)

- Can you elaborate on the workbooks that you have published?

- Can you elaborate on your collaboration with BeSmartOnline?

- Can you elaborate on teacher training?

- Why is PSCD particularly well suited to teach about digital citizenship?

- Are you aware of any other cross-curricular initiatives that focus on this topic?

Interview Schedule 7: Mr. Brian Chircop

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- Do you think that teaching children how to behave ethically online is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- Are you aware of any worrying trends that you think should be addressed by schools?

- Do you think that educators are doing enough to promote ethical behaviour online?

- In your opinion, how can educators improve their practices in this regard?

- How does the new Secondary (years 9 – 11) Social Studies syllabus deal with digital citizenship? (Which topics are covered?)

- How is the new syllabus different from the old syllabus in this regard?

- Is Social Studies studied by all students in the secondary school?

- Can you elaborate on the resources and teacher training for this new syllabus?

- Why is Social Studies particularly well suited to teach about digital citizenship?

- Are you aware of any other cross-curricular initiatives that focus on this topic?

Interview Schedule 8: Mr. James Catania

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- Do you think that teaching children how to behave responsibly online is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- Are you aware of any worrying trends that you think should be addressed by schools?

- Do you think that educators are doing enough to promote ethical behaviour online?

- In your opinion, how can educators improve their practices in this regard?

- How does the new Secondary (years 9 – 11) ICT syllabus deal with digital citizenship? (Which topics are covered?)

- How is the new syllabus different from the old syllabus in this regard?

- Is ICT studied by all students in the secondary school?

- Can you elaborate on the resources and teacher training for this new syllabus?

- Why is ICT particularly well suited to teach about digital citizenship?

- Are you aware of any other cross-curricular initiatives that focus on this topic?

Interview Schedule 9: Dr. Alex Grech

- To what extent do digital technologies affect the lives of young people nowadays?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- Can you give me some information regarding Malta's digital education policy?

- In your opinion, how should schools promote ethical online behaviour?

- Do you think that enough is being done in this regard?

- Do you have any suggestions for better practice?

- In your opinion, what is the most pressing issue?

- Do you think that critical media literacy is being tackled well in Maltese secondary schools?

- Do you think that the right media literacy education would help promote ethical online behaviour?

- If you were to design a curriculum for teaching digital citizenship in secondary schools, what would it look like?

Interview Schedule 10: Prof. Kenneth Wain

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- Do you think that teaching children how to behave ethically online is important in today's world?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship, parents or schools?

- Are you aware of any worrying trends that you think should be addressed by schools?

- Do you think that educators are doing enough to promote ethical behaviour online?

- In your opinion, how can educators improve their practices in this regard?

- How does the Secondary (years 9 – 11) Ethics syllabus deal with digital citizenship? (Which topics are covered?)

- How is the new syllabus different from the old syllabus in this regard?

- Why is Ethics particularly well-suited to teach about digital citizenship?

- Is Ethics studied by all students in the secondary school?

- Can you elaborate on the resources and teacher training for teachers of Ethics?

- Are you aware of any other cross-curricular initiatives that focus on this topic?

Interview Schedule 11: Mr. Mark Spiteri

- What is the remit of BeSmartOnline?

- To what extent do digital technologies affect the lives of young people?

- In your experience, are there any differences between the experiences of males and female youths with regards to online behaviour?

- Are you aware of any worrying trends that you think should be addressed by schools?

- How do you reach out to secondary school students?

- Do you think that educators are doing enough to promote ethical behaviour online?

- In your opinion, how can educators improve their practices in this regard?

- Can you elaborate on the training that you give to teachers?

- Can you elaborate on the PSCD workbooks?

Interview Schedule 12: Ms. Suzanne Garcia Imbernon

- In your opinion, what are the benefits and challenges that digital technologies have for schools?

- To what extent do digital technologies affect the lives of young people?

- In your experience, are there any differences between the experiences of males and female youths with regards to online behaviour?

- Do you think that teaching about digital citizenship is important in today's world? Why/Why not?

- In your opinion, who is mostly responsible for teaching digital citizenship - parents or schools?

- Are you aware of any worrying trends that you think should be addressed by schools?

- In your opinion, how should schools promote ethical online behaviour?

- Do you think that enough is being done in this regard?

- Do you have any suggestions for better practice?

- Can you tell me something about your collaboration with BeSmartOnline?

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearances

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form Approval

Institutional Access: State Schools

Institutional Access: Church Schools

The screenshots of these ethical clearances have been removed from this electronic copy of the thesis due to personal identifiers and contact details.