DOCTORAL THESIS

Young people's social media practices in Greece

developing identities online and shaping future aspirations

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by

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms and the implications of their use for young people and education has become an area of research which has gradually attracted increased interest and is still expanding.

The present study explores the online social media practices of young people (14-17 years old) living and studying in Athens (Greece) in order to investigate how these practices relate to the development of their identities and future aspirations. Specific attention is placed on investigating how these practices vary in relation to young people's social locations (such as gender, social class background and ethnicity). The research process follows a mixed-methods design by using both quantitative and qualitative research methods including: 1) a questionnaire of 463 young people, and 2) follow-up semi-structured interviews with a sample of 45 questionnaire participants.

The research findings suggest that young people engage in a variety of communicational, informational and creative practices on social media platforms. Social media constitute a space where they navigate relationships and express themselves. Thus, their social media practices relate directly to their everyday experiences which contribute to the shaping of their identities. In addition, it is argued that patterns of future aspirations are shaped by structural forces related to young people's social locations. However, it is also suggested that social media engagement is associated with the development of individualised discourses of future aspirations which minimise the influence of structural inequalities.

Several associations have been identified between social media practices and participants' gender, type of school, level of parental education and *ethnikotita*. Thus, it is argued that social locations frame young people's social media practices and the ways these relate to the development of their identities and future aspirations. The present study's contribution lies in discussing the complexities of young people's engagement with social media platforms in relation to their social context.

CONTENTS

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First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity to design and conduct a research project - a learning journey which has been one of the most significant experiences of my life. I strongly believe that collective contribution is key to any individual achievement, and this study would not have been completed without standing on the shoulders of a handful of people whose contribution I wish to acknowledge.

I would like to express my enormous appreciation to my Director of Studies, Professor Marie-Pierre Moreau, and to my Co-Supervisor, Dr Billy Wong, for their constant support and supervision throughout this learning journey. Their guidance and feedback have been essential for the development and completion of this research project. I was fortunate to receive a University of Roehampton Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship and I feel deeply grateful to the University of Roehampton for this support. In addition, I would like to thank all the students and school staff who participated in this study and facilitated the research process.

Last but not least, a very special gratitude goes to my friends in London, Natalia and Cristina, with whom we met as fellow PhD students and who soon became my London family and my home away from home; and to my friends from Greece, Αντρέας, Δημήτρης, Δήμητρα, Ευγενία, Κρυσταλλία, Μαίρη and Σπύρος whose tremendous support, understanding and encouragement have been invaluable.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Αλέξης and Βάγια, and to my brother, Σπύρος, who have been a constant source of inspiration throughout my life. Their unconditional love and belief in me have been an endless source of power and motivation to keep pursuing my dreams.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the background and scope of the research study

The present study aims to explore the online social media practices of young people (14-17 years old) living and studying in Athens, Greece, in order to investigate how these online practices relate to the development of their identities[1] and future aspirations, with specific attention to how these practices vary in relation to young people's social locations (such as gender, social class background and ethnicity)[2].

In this chapter, the research background and the links to previous projects at the intersection of the fields of youth, media and education will be discussed. Furthermore, the rationale and context of this research will be explained in order to clarify the study's aims and research questions. Finally, the particularities of the context in which this study was conducted will be identified and a summary of the structure of the subsequent chapters of this thesis will be provided.

1.1.1 Personal background

The impetus for this thesis came from my experience as a teacher in Athens and my personal interest in researching students' out-of-school learning experiences. In order to describe how I developed my interest in the subject of the thesis, it is essential to refer to my educational and professional background. Both these backgrounds are closely related to the field of education. I developed my interest in research after completing my Master's degree in Lifelong Learning, at the Institute of Education, UCL, where I conducted my first research project as part of my dissertation. During my studies I also attended a course entitled 'Technology and Education Beyond the Classroom' which initiated my interest in the use of digital media among children and young people.

[1] Throughout this thesis, the terms 'identity' and 'identities' will both be used. The use of the term 'identity' refers to the notion of identity as a theoretical concept, whereas 'identities' is used to highlight the argument that individuals have a repertoire of various identities that they use depending on the social context in which they find themselves (Hall, 1996; Ross, 2007). The concept of 'identity' and relevant literature is discussed in Section 3.2.

[2] Further explanation about the use of the term 'social locations' in the present study is provided in Section 2.3.

After completing my Master's, I worked for several years as a primary school teacher at a private school in Athens. As a teacher, I was introduced to the use of digital media in the school context. This experience acted as a stimulus to the development of my interest in the use of digital media by students. Through my teaching role I could notice that even younger children were familiar with the use of digital media and were developing out-of-school online practices and digital skills. I also became interested in researching how young people experience online contexts. One of my main pedagogic principles as a teacher was to use students' out-of-school learning experiences and create connections with learning that takes place within the school context. Therefore, after observing that social media practices were becoming embedded in students' everyday lives, I considered it useful to study how these practices relate to children's and young people's identity development.

I started searching for relevant research projects and became familiar with the literature. In particular, I came across the EU Kids Online (2014) research project and became more interested in the use of social media in particular, as this field of study was still evolving. The development of the research proposal went through several changes as I reviewed the relevant literature, and its final form was decided upon the gaps identified in previous research (see discussion in Section 1.1.2).

1.1.2 Background to the research study

The contemporary context of Western societies has been characterised by the emergence of various technological tools and digital innovations, especially since the late 1990s. The term 'digital age' has been initially adopted to highlight the widespread use of a variety of digital devices. Along with terms such as 'information age' and 'knowledge age', this term refers to the contemporary era which has been marked by advances in computing technology, the processing of large amounts of information, and online communication (Loveless and Williamson, 2013). As technological innovations evolve rapidly, the 'digital

age' is currently characterised by the popular use of various mobile Internet-enabled devices, such as tablets and smartphones. These digital innovations have enabled new ways of communicating through a variety of available tools, online platforms and applications. In the context of this study, the term 'digital age' is used to refer to this contemporary historical period and its distinctive characteristics as described above.

Educational researchers have begun to explore the influence of this technologically mediated environment on the ways in which children and young people are growing up and learning. Previous research has initially focused on exploring the implications of each type of digital tool or device in relation to various aspects of children's and young people's lives and identities. More recent research projects have adopted a more holistic approach by exploring the social implications of all types of 'digital media' (such as TV, PCs, laptops, cameras, smartphones etc.) taken together.

The term 'digital media' has been used as an umbrella term to refer to the variety of digital devices, tools and platforms (such as websites, applications, videogames, video-editing software etc.) which are used by children and young people (Buckingham, 2008; Ito et al., 2008a). As a result of the rapid development of new types of digital media over the years, the term 'new media' has also been used in the literature to distinguish between older types of digital media and more recent and advanced ones, such as internet-enabled mobile devices, smartphones, online platforms and applications (Ito, 2010; Zemmels, 2012). However, taking into consideration the fact that there are constant and rapid advances in the development of 'new media', what is described as 'new' is rapidly changing. For the purpose of this study, the term 'digital media' will be used whenever there is a need to refer to all types of digital devices, tools, software and applications which are available nowadays. Nevertheless, the type of digital media which is going to be the main focus of this research project is 'social media'.

To begin with, it is essential to define the term ‘social media’ in order to provide an understanding of the types of media that it entails. Various definitions of this term exist in the literature (which will be more extensively discussed in Chapter 3) because this sector of the media is still developing and undergoing constant changes. Blogs, social networking platforms and video/image/file sharing platforms started to develop before 2005 with the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies and the term ‘social media’ was first used at that time to describe these new online platforms (Fuchs, 2014). Initially the term was used to describe the relevant Web 2.0 technologies that consisted of Wikis, blogs, social networking sites, microblogs and content-sharing sites (Haddon, 2015). The definition that conveys more clearly the meaning of ‘social media’ nowadays is provided by boyd (2014), who argues that the term refers to the social networking, video sharing and (micro)blogging websites and platforms which were developed after the year 2000 and which enable users to participate by creating and sharing their own content online.

Social media and the implications of their use for children, young people and education has become an area of research which has gradually attracted increased interest and is still expanding. This interest has been initially driven by the fact that the level of young people’s engagement with online networks or ‘social networking sites’ (terms which have been used in previous research projects to describe social media) has been high and is still growing, as has been indicated in various research reports throughout the years (Lenhart, 2012; Madden et al., 2013; EU Kids Online, 2014; Mascheroni and Cuman, 2014; Lenhart, 2015; Ofcom, 2015; Ofcom, 2016). As engagement in social media platforms has become a daily practice for many young people, their communicative practices are being transformed. Various research projects have illuminated the ways that young people navigate their lives between online and offline contexts (Ito et al., 2008b; Greenhow and Burton, 2011; Vitak and Ellison, 2012; Wohn et al., 2013; boyd, 2014; Ellison et al., 2014a; Gardner and Davis, 2014; Livingstone, 2014; Michikyan et al., 2015; Livingstone

and Sefton-Green, 2016), while also providing insight into the practices that are being developed through social media.

An important aspect of social media that makes them particularly interesting for researchers is the affordances that these online platforms provide. The term ‘affordances’, in the context of social media, refers to the structural features that are part of the design and environment of these platforms (Hutchby, 2001; Livingstone, 2014). For example, among the social media affordances are the features of creating and editing your online profile, sending synchronous or asynchronous messages, managing privacy settings, entering online groups of interest (Peter and Valkenburg, 2013; Livingstone, 2014), receiving notifications of incoming messages, adding location information to posts, and many other specific features which may vary from one type of social media platform to another. These features are part of the design and environment of the social media platforms and their use requires the knowledge and actions of the users (Livingstone, 2014).

By using social media, young people are engaging in various online practices (such as creation of online profiles, online messaging, posting, creating and editing photographs, videos etc.). More recent studies and research projects (Erstad, 2013; Loveless and Williamson, 2013; Erstad et al., 2016; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016) have started to explore the ways that the affordances of social media and the online practices in which young people engage may shape or transform their communicative practices, their daily experiences, their ways of learning and the development of their identities. Although these studies have provided very insightful arguments and have highlighted the importance of researching ‘online’ practices as something that is not detached from the ‘offline’ experiences of young people, it has been acknowledged that there is a need to further expand research in this area. The following statement provides a clear justification for meeting this need:

> As the Internet becomes ever more embedded into children's lifeworld in a host of increasingly taken-for-granted ways, research is called to examine children's engagement with the world not only on but also, more importantly, through the Internet.
>
> (Livingstone et al., 2017: 15)

1.1.3 Scope of the research

The present study seeks to explore the ways in which young people (14 to 17 years old) living in Athens (Greece) use social media in relation to their identities and future aspirations. More specifically, this study investigates how young people develop their identities and how their online practices relate to the formation of their future educational and career aspirations. A particular focus will be directed towards a comparative investigation of these practices and aspirations among young people who come from different social locations.

Therefore, the present research has been designed with the aim of contributing to previous studies in this area, firstly by exploring the types of social media practices in which young people engage daily, secondly by investigating the ways that these practices may relate to their identities and future aspirations, and thirdly by determining whether these practices differ in relation to young people's social locations. The reason for choosing to explore social media practices in relation to youth lies in the fact that young people (14-17 years old) belong to the most active group of social media users (as has been presented in the aforementioned research reports). Moreover, the focus of this project on exploring the relation between social media practices and identities has been decided based, firstly, on the fact that this period is important for the process of identity development, and secondly, because, in keeping with a socio-cultural approach to the notion of identity, the social context and social interactions are crucial for developing aspects of identity (Hall, 1996; Lawler, 2014). By exploring the relationship between young people's online social media

practices and the development of their identity, an attempt is made to support previous research on identifying the connections between the online-offline 'lifeworlds' (Erstad et al., 2013) of young people living in the digital age.

Furthermore, the concept of future aspirations is treated as an aspect of identity because it provides insight into how young people imagine their future selves. Therefore, by investigating young people's future aspirations and the ways these are being shaped, a better understanding of their sense of identity could be achieved. In addition, previous research on social media practices and future aspirations is relatively scarce, especially in the Greek context. Last but not least, exploring future aspirations can provide an understanding of the interplay between individuals and social structures (Archer et al., 2014). This interplay between the individual and the social context is the focus of this study, which aims to ascertain whether young people from different social locations engage in similar social media practices and to explore how these practices relate to their identities and aspirations. As inequalities 'may themselves be reconfigured in the digital age' (Livingstone et. al, 2017:15), it is useful to explore whether and, if so, how social media practices may relate to aspects of inequalities in the digital age.

1.2 Research aims

After describing the background, the scope, and the context of the present study, the aims and research questions will be presented.

The present study aims firstly to explore the types of online social media practices in which young people in Greece (Athens) engage and the ways that these practices relate to the development of their identities and future aspirations. The study's findings can provide an understanding of how these practices are embedded in young people's everyday lives and the ways in which identities and future aspirations are being developed in the digital age.

The research questions that have been formulated to achieve these aims (in the context of Greece) are as follows:

1. Which are the main online practices that young people (14-17 years old) engage with on social media platforms?

2. How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their identities?

3. How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their educational and career aspirations?

4. How do young people's social locations relate to their online practices and engagement with social media platforms?

The following table illustrates which of the research questions contributes to each of the general aims of this study.

Table 1.1: Research questions in relation to the aims of the study

<table>
<tr><th>RESEARCH QUESTION</th><th>RESEARCH AIM</th></tr>
<tr><td>1. Which are the main online practices that young people (14-17 years old) engage with on social media platforms?</td><td>• Explore young people's online practices in order to support and expand research at the intersection of the fields of digital media, youth and education.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2. How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their identities?</td><td rowspan="3">• Provide an understanding of youth identities, online social media practices and future aspirations in the context of contemporary Greece.
• Listen to young people's voices and their own personal accounts of growing up in the 'digital age'.
• Explore how young people's social location relates to their online social media practices.
• Explore the potential opportunities or risks that online social media platforms create for young people according to their perspectives.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. How do young people's social media practices relate to the development of their educational and career aspirations?</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. How do young people's social locations relate to their online practices and engagement with social media platforms?</td></tr>
</table>

1.3 Areas of contribution

This study aims to provide an explanatory account of the ways in which young people in Athens (Greece) use online social media platforms by investigating their everyday online practices and by identifying how these practices relate to their identities and to their future aspirations.

This work will contribute to the field of research in youth studies about young people's lives as it will explore the online practices that are embedded in their daily lives. Hence, it will expand research about youth and media that focuses on the interconnections between online/offline practices, providing a more holistic approach to young people's identities and lives. It will provide an overview of their practices on social media platforms and enhance our understanding of how these relate to the development of young people's identities and aspirations in the digital age. Findings related to potential differences among young people from different social locations will contribute to the understanding of the ways in which the social context influences their identities and future aspirations. Although previous research into youth and media has focused on how young people represent themselves online, most previous studies do not concentrate on the relation between online practices and future aspirations. In addition, research into online practices remains particularly under-developed in the Greek context.

Furthermore, this study will provide both quantitative and qualitative findings in relation to the aforementioned aspects, in contrast with previous studies which have focused either on quantitative approaches (using surveys to identify social media practices and their relation to aspects of identity), or on qualitative approaches (using interviews to understand young people's views of their social media practices). By following a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to contribute to research on young people's uses of social media by combining both quantitative and qualitative findings. Finally, the study will also contribute

to wider discussions about growing up in the digital age by recognising young people's perspectives and listening to their own voices and perceptions.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The present study is organised into eight chapters:

Chapter 1 ('Introduction') provides an introduction to the background and the scope of the study. The research questions and the main aims of the research project have been discussed along with the personal background of the researcher.

Chapter 2 ('Conducting research in the Greek Context') will focus on the particularities of conducting this research in Greece. Firstly, it will discuss previous studies about young people's social media practices and future aspirations within the Greek context and then it will underline the particularities in conceptualising social class, ethnicity and gender in the context of Greek society. Since the data collection process took place in the biggest city, and capital of Greece, Athens, a justification of this choice will be presented along with a discussion about its particularities.

Chapter 3 ('Developing identities and future aspirations in the digital age: An overview of the literature') will provide a critical overview of the relevant literature and the theoretical background of the study. The first part will draw on previous works about youth and their use of social media platforms. The following sections will discuss the conceptualisation of the notions of 'identity' and 'future aspirations' with reference to relevant theoretical approaches which take into account the opportunities and challenges of the digital age. The last part of this chapter will examine previous discussions of social inequalities and the meanings these divides acquire in the digital age.

Chapter 4 ('Methodology') will describe the research methods employed in this research project and will discuss the various methodological issues that have arisen during it. The rationale of the present study will be discussed to justify the choice of the particular

research methods and their relation to the research questions. In addition, the research design will be presented along with the ethical considerations that underpin this study.

In Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece'), the quantitative findings regarding young people's social media practices will be presented and discussed. The identified associations between specific variables such as gender, *ethnikotita*, type of school and level of parental education, and participants' social media practices will be presented. In the final section of this chapter, the key findings of the quantitative analysis will be highlighted, and their implications will be discussed.

Chapter 6 ('Developing identities') will discuss findings from the semi-structured interviews and will explore young people's social media practices. The analysis of the qualitative findings will provide an understanding of the ways in which young people's online social media practices relate to their identities, as well as of the ways that social media practices are influenced by participants' social locations.

Chapter 7 ('Developing aspirations') will focus on the qualitative analysis of young people's future aspirations and their relationship to social media practices. This chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the types of aspirations discussed by the participants in this study and of the factors which influence these aspirations. It will also provide an understanding of how social media practices influence young people's future educational and career aspirations. Finally, it will discuss how young people's social locations (gender, type of school, parental educational level, *ethnikotita*[3]) relate to the development of future aspirations.

Chapter 8 ('Conclusion') will provide a summary of the research findings in order to respond to this study's research questions. In addition, it will acknowledge the limitations of the study and it will discuss its implications and suggestions for future research.

[3] The use of the term *ethnikotita* will be discussed in Chapter 2 ('Conducting research in the Greek context'), Section 2.3.2.

CHAPTER 2: Conducting research in the Greek Context

This chapter provides the national context within which the study was conducted. The Greek context is characterised by a lack of previous research about young people's online social media practices, especially in relation to future aspirations. The main aim of this chapter is to provide an insight into existing studies conducted previously in the fields of youth, media and aspirations, along with a discussion of the particularities of the contemporary social context of Greece. Another aim is to discuss the issues of conducting research in an urban metropolitan environment, such as the city of Athens (the biggest city and capital of Greece), where the data collection for this project took place.

2.1 The Greek context: Developing aspirations in an age of precariousness

During the last decade, vast socio-economic changes have occurred within the Greek context. Since 2008 in particular, the financial crisis has been associated with various political, economic and social shifts. High unemployment rates, and especially high youth unemployment rates, have always been apparent within Greek society (Bell and Blanchflower, 2015). However, during the economic crisis, rates of unemployment have increased. Data provided by Eurostat (2012) indicated that since 2008 a large number of employees have become redundant, while at the same time the opportunities of finding another job are restricted (Papadopoulos, 2016). A more recent report showcases that, Greece has the highest unemployment rates (20.7% in October 2017, 23.3% in October 2016) among the European member states (Eurostat, 2018).

Similarly, the same report highlights that the Greek youth unemployment rate holds the highest place in the EU (40.8% in October 2017). Young people are among the social groups which have been intensely affected by the contemporary context of the economic crisis and austerity policies. The economic crisis has led to a large reduction in family incomes and to a greater decline in job opportunities available for young people, causing the exacerbation of work precariousness and unemployment (Kretsos, 2014). A

combination of social, economic and cultural factors, such as the informal economy and the familialistic provision of welfare in Greece (presuming that families take responsibility for the care of their members), have always contributed to high youth unemployment rates (Kretsos, 2014). However, austerity policies have had an even greater impact on young people's job opportunities and working conditions. Therefore, it can be assumed that the process of developing future aspirations has become a complex task for young people growing up in this context.

Young people's future aspirations in the Greek context is an under-researched area. Research into students' educational and career aspirations started to develop in the 1980s and the majority of these early studies concluded that young people in Greece have always formed high educational aspirations, with the aim of receiving a university degree, preferably in a 'high-status' profession such as medicine, law or engineering (Gouvias and Vitsilakis-Soroniatis, 2005). Most of these earlier projects provided descriptive data about educational and career aspirations, whereas later research projects have investigated factors such as family characteristics and socio-economic status, providing an explanatory account of the development of students' aspirations (Dimitropoulos et al., 1994; Gouvias and Vitsilakis-Soroniatis, 2005).

Previous studies in the UK context have discussed how classed and racialised 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990) shapes students' perceptions of entering university as either taken for granted or as an option which is not for people like them (Reay, David and Ball; 2005). In the Greek context, parental aspirations and parental socio-economic characteristics have been identified as factors influencing the development of young people's educational and career aspirations (Vryonides and Gouvias, 2012). It has been argued that the process of choosing a university in Greece is related to the family's socio-economic background. Thus, students from more affluent backgrounds choose more prestigious departments, whereas students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are often 'unable' to achieve

their aspirations despite their wish to get into prestigious institutions (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2009; Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides, 2009; Vryonides and Gouvias, 2012). This reflects the problematic nature of the discourse about 'raising aspirations' which has been used to incentivise young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds in order to overcome structural obstacles (Zipin et al., 2015). This discourse oversimplifies and mutes the importance of factors such as social conditions, gender, ethnicity and the intersection of these factors in the pursuit of 'higher' aspirations. Nevertheless, in the present study the concept of aspiration is understood as related to social structures and participants' social location (the use of this term is further explained in Section 2.3).

Previous research about the composition of the student population in Greek universities has also provided data indicating unequal representation of various socio-economic groups (Chryssakis and Soulis, 2001; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2006, 2008; Chryssakis et al., 2009; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2009; Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides, 2009; Vryonides and Gouvias, 2012). However, the majority of the aforementioned projects have focused on descriptive approaches to students' aspirations and there is limited empirical research exploring in depth the development of aspirations, especially in the contemporary context.

In a more recent study, Chalari (2014) studied the life experiences of the Greek crisis from the perspectives of Greek people from three different generations. Although feelings of uncertainty, disappointment, pessimism and anxiety were common among participants from all generations, the youngest participants were mainly worried about their prospects of finding and keeping a job (Chalari, 2014). In this changing context, where the number of people facing uncertainty and the risk of unemployment is rising, it is interesting to investigate how young people's aspirations are being shaped. Future aspirations and the factors affecting them will be revisited in Section 3.4.4 of Chapter 3 ('Developing identities and future aspirations in the digital age: An overview of the literature').

2.2 Online practices and social media engagement: The case of Greece

The Greek context is also characterised by a dearth of research into young people's online social media practices. A review of the literature on previous research projects in the Greek context shows that most previous studies have focused on the use of internet in general by the general population (Stald and Haddon, 2008). Until 2008, the digital profile of Greece was characterised by several divides, as internet users were more likely to be young (16-24 years old), male, highly educated and living in urban areas (Georgopoulou, 2011). Recent statistical data provided by Eurostat (2017) show that since 2011 there has been a significant expansion of internet use in Greek households. In another recent report published by the European Commission (2017), it is observed that Greek citizens engage intensively in various online activities (reading news, browsing online content, participating in social networks) but at the same time demonstrate low performance in advanced digital skills (European Commission, 2017). In relation to young people's digital activities in particular, extant research in Greece tends to focus mostly on the use of internet by students in the school context (Tsitouridou and Vryzas, 2004; Karsiotis et al., 2005; Tsaliki et al., 2012).

The most relevant research offering substantial data about young people's use of social media platforms has been provided by the EU Kids Online project through its National Perspectives report (Haddon et al., 2012). This report presents useful data about children's and young people's use of internet in general, their online activities and skills, as well as online risks and styles of parental mediation. More specifically, in relation to the use of internet in general, it was reported that 66% of children aged 9-12 in Greece access internet through their mobiles (the highest rate among all other European countries, where the average was 22%) and 56% use the internet daily. In relation to social media in particular, it was reported that 33% of children aged 9-12 in Greece use social networking sites and with this rate rising to 70% for teenagers (13-16 years old). Interestingly, young children

and teenagers in Greece have been classified according to these findings as among the most active Facebook users in Europe, after Italians and Cypriots, with 65% of teenagers and 31% of young children in Greece having reported that they have used Facebook (Haddon et al., 2012).

With the aforementioned findings having classified Greek young people among the most active Facebook users in the European context, it is important to expand research into the types of social media platforms that they use daily and to investigate further their online social media practices. In addition, taking into consideration the aforementioned difficulties that young people face regarding their future employment opportunities in Greece, it is important to explore whether and how their online social media practices may relate to their future aspirations and also whether young people use social media to foster opportunities related to these aspirations.

2.3 Particularities of the Greek context: Discussing social class, ethnicity and gender

As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the aims of this study is to investigate how young people's social locations relate to their online practices and engagement in social media platforms (RQ 4). Bourdieu (1984) has discussed the different aspects of a person's location in social space by referring to composition of capital, and trajectory (which are related to gender, age, ethnicity) and the way in which these factors affect the habitus (Weininger, 2005). As the present study follows an intersectional approach, the aim is to provide an understanding of the complexities of participants' experiences in contemporary society, taking into consideration various factors that frame them. Regarding social inequalities issues, the emphasis of this analytical approach is on investigating the combination of various factors that may shape inequalities, such as gender, social class and ethnicity (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Social class, race and gender have been discussed in previous studies as crucial factors in shaping educational inequalities (Reay, 2017; Ball, 2006). By using the notion of 'social locations', the focus is placed on the intersection of

different social structures (Anthias, 2012). In the present study, the term 'social locations' is used in order to refer to the intersection of participants' gender, ethnicity and social class background. The role of social class background, gender and ethnicity will be investigated during the data analysis in order to explore the way they are framing participants' experiences; thus, the conceptualisation of these factors, within the Greek context in particular, will be discussed in Sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3.

2.3.1 Social class

In the contemporary context of Greece, discussions of social class categories have become more complex, since there have been rapid changes in the income and working conditions of numerous households due to the economic crisis and the implementation of austerity policies. Since 2008, austerity policies have led to a reduction in minimum wages by 22% for all and by 32% for all employees under the age of 25 regardless of their occupation (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2012; Papadopoulos, 2016). Due to the aforementioned wage reductions and the rise of unemployment rates, the economic condition of many households has been greatly affected. However, there is a dearth of studies discussing how social class categories may apply in the contemporary context of Greece.

In previous studies conducted in Greece, various analytical tools have been deployed to discuss social class. Tsiplakides (2018) used parental educational level as the sole indicator of university students' socio-economic background in his study of the impact of parental education on differentiation in higher education. Zisi and Stalidis (2017), in their study of social class and mental health in urban communities during the economic crisis, used occupational status in order to assign participants to different occupational categories. Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides (2009) used the OPCS (1991) scale to define students' socio-economic background, by classifying them as upper, middle and working class according to parental occupation and educational level. In another study, Sianou-Kyrgiou

(2008), drawing on the work of Crompton (1998), used a classification of six social and occupational categories. A similar classification was used by Vryonides and Gouvias (2012) in their study of the role of social class in shaping parental aspirations for students' educational and occupational prospects. To define social class background, they combined information on parental educational level and type of occupation. In their approach, parents were classified within five social categories using descriptive information about their occupation and educational level.

However, none of these studies provides an explicit discussion that explains in detail the classification process and the way the occupational and educational level data were combined. The classification of participants into social classes by combining information about parental occupation and educational level can be very complex in the contemporary context, where parents may possess high educational qualifications but are currently unemployed or have a relatively low income. In earlier research, it has also been argued that social class stratification tools adopted by researchers from other countries may not be applicable to the Greek context. Emmanouil (2016) argued that analytical tools on social class, such as Goldthorpe's (2007) and ESeC (Rose and Harrison, 2007), are not suitable for analysing Greek social stratification because they emphasise occupational differences and categorisations that apply to highly developed and industrialised societies, whereas the Greek society cannot be defined as such.

In the present study, in order to overcome the difficulties of classifying participants in a particular social class and the absence of information on students' financial background, it has been decided that parental educational level will be used as an indicator of young people's social class background (Emmanouil, 2016; Tsiplakides, 2018). During the data collection phase, numerous cases were observed of parents having a high educational level but not being employed in a professional or managerial occupation. In addition, several types of occupation were described by the students using generalised terms (i.e. self-

employed) which cannot provide a clear understanding of the parents' occupational level and qualifications. Therefore, the tools used in previous studies which combined information about the level of education and type of occupation would not provide a useful and reliable analytical framework for the present study.

As it will be further explained in Section 4.2, the types of school may also serve as an indicator of participants' socio-economic background. Participants attending evening and vocational schools reported lower levels of parental education and unskilled/semi-skilled occupations, whereas participants attending private schools reported higher levels of parental education and professional/managerial occupations. Therefore, it can be assumed that participants from evening/vocational schools were likely to come from working-class backgrounds, whereas participants attending private schools were more likely to come from more affluent socio-economic backgrounds. The student population attending state schools was diverse, including students from various socio-economic backgrounds. Previous research findings reported by OECD (2011) about differences in school characteristics between state and private schools in several European countries, pointed to a significant association between students' socio-economic status and the type of school in the Greek context, with students attending private schools reporting a higher socio-economic status than those attending other types of schools.

For the purposes of the present study, it has been considered that the use of 'type of school' as a variable in the analysis will provide an additional insight into participants' social class background, as recent research findings regarding inequality in children's education in rich countries (including Greece) have demonstrated significant variations between different types of schools which are linked to students' background (Chzhen et al., 2018).

Chapter 4 ('Methodology') will provide a more detailed discussion of the way this information was collected and analysed.

2.3.2 'Ethnikotita'

In the contemporary Greek context, it has been observed that the economic crisis has led to a rise in anti-immigrant expressions and has exacerbated the employment status of the immigrant population living in Greece, leading many of them to unemployment and making them unable to renew their residence permit (Karyotis and Patrikios, 2010; Michail, 2013; Katartzi, 2018). After 1990, Greece became host to large numbers of immigrants, with Albanians constituting the largest immigrant community (Vathi, 2010). Most immigrants come from neighbouring countries, but the newest waves of immigration come from the Middle East (Baldwin-Edwards and Apostolatou, 2008). In addition, during the past few years Greece has become a host country for large numbers of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Although the Greek authorities have implemented immigration laws to regulate admission, a lack of integration policies is observed (Vathi, 2010). This deficit is partly due to issues related to the quality and efficiency of public services, but also to prejudice surrounding immigrants' cultural backgrounds (Jordan et al., 2003). These changes also pose challenges for educators and underline the importance of engaging in discussions about multicultural education (Boronski and Hassan 2015; Race, 2015).

Discussions of ethnicity, in the Greek context, have mostly focused on conceptualising the 'Greek identity' and analysing the characteristics on which it is constructed. According to Gropas and Triantafyllidou (2007), the Greek national identity is constructed on the basis of three characteristics: common ancestry, cultural traditions (Greek language) and religion (Vathi, 2010). Moreover, Tzanelli (2006:40) argues that the discourse on Greek identity conflates with that of race because of the symbolic interpretation of 'Greekness' as built upon 'blood bonds'. In the educational context, there have been previous discussions about the mono-cultural structure of school textbooks and the cultivation of an image of Greek superiority in achievements, together with the undervaluation of what is labelled as 'non-

Greek' (Zachos, 2009). Therefore, in the Greek context the notion of ethnicity has been developed around discussions of ethnic rather than racial characteristics.

In Greek, the term 'ethnicity' is translated as 'εθνικότητα' – 'ethnikotita' (a derivative of the word 'ethnos' which means nation). This is the term used in the final section of the questionnaire of the present study (see Questionnaire in Appendix II and III). Participants have been asked through the questionnaire to self-complete the ethnicity ('εθνικότητα') of each of their parents in an open question. It has been observed that students used nationality categories to describe their ethnic characteristics when they completed this section (for example, Greek, Albanian or Filipino). Therefore, taking into consideration the particular characteristics of the Greek context, it should be noted that in this study the notion of ethnicity is tightly related to that of nationality. In order to acknowledge this particularity, the term '*ethnikotita*' will be employed because it is believed that it encompasses better the conceptualisation of ethnicity within the Greek context.

2.3.3 Gender

The Greek economic crisis has changed the opportunities for young people from different social class backgrounds, but the impact has been even greater for those young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and also for women in comparison to men, due to the construction of femininity within the Greek context, which requires women to assume the role of family carer (Hoskins, 2017). In Greece, discussions of gender and gender equality are initiated in close relation to legislative actions and policy implementations (Stratigaki, 2004; Kyriakidou, 2012). Since Greece follows European legislative practices regarding gender equality, the policy implementations are sometimes adhered to for the sake of 'political correctness', but the everyday practices and gender balance indicators are not changing accordingly (Kyriakidou, 2012).

In the recent Gender Equality Index report (2017), where European countries were assessed by measuring gender gaps in the domains of work, money, knowledge, time,

power, health and violence during the years 2005-2015, Greece ranked last among all European countries (EU28) and was identified as the country where the most improvement in gender equality is needed (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). In relation to gender gap in education, previous studies indicate that women are under-represented in Computing and STEM university courses (Kordaki and Berdousis, 2017), but over-represented in Education and Humanities courses (Livanos and Pouliakas, 2012).

Furthermore, gender differences have been observed in the digital skills of men and women in Greece. In earlier survey data from a national report on digital skills and internet use during years 2008 to 2010, significant gender differences have been observed, with 41.9% of men being regular internet users, compared with only 26.1% of women (Observatory for the Greek Information Society, 2010). As a response to the existing gender inequalities, the Greek General Secretariat for Gender Equality announced a plan of action ('National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020'), for combating discrimination against women and girls. Among the main aims listed in this plan of action, was the encouragement of ICT use by women (General Secretariat for Gender Equality, 2013). Thus, it is important to investigate how gender may relate to young people's online social media practices and the shaping of their future aspirations.

2.4 Conducting research in Athens: Characteristics and particularities

The data collection for the present study has been conducted in Athens, the biggest city and capital of Greece. This choice has been made for practical reasons since a country-wide data collection process would require the involvement of more researchers and more time for its completion. However, such a process could be recommended as a basis for future research in order to provide a more holistic understanding of young people's online social media practices in the Greek context in general.

Recruiting participants from a specific urban context has several implications which needs to be taken into consideration. Athens is a cosmopolitan metropolis with a large population

of just under four million residents, according to the most recent census in 2011 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2014). Compared to the general population of Greece, which is estimated at just under eleven million residents, it can be understood that Athens is a highly populated city. In the same report, it is stated that just over 900.000 of these residents are foreign and that most of these reside in the city centres of Greece. Older data presented on the official webpage of the municipality of Athens indicates that in 2001, 22% of the total population of the city of Athens were foreign residents. Hence, Athens is characterised by an ethnic mix (Arapoglou and Maloutas, 2011), which continues to change, especially during recent years, due to the large number of immigrant populations settling in Greece.

Regarding the student population of Athens, there are no public data regarding the ethnicity and household income of students attending schools in Greece. The Greek Ministry of Education has grouped schools which operate in the wider area of Attica (including urban and suburban areas) in seven district areas according to the geographic location of each school (a map and more detailed description of the geographical districts is provided in Chapter 4). Taking into consideration the fact that most foreign citizens reside in Greek urban centres, it is expected that the student population of Athens will be characterised by a mix of ethnicities.

Furthermore, since investigating social media practices is one of this study's objectives, it can be assumed that students living in Athens may encounter more opportunities for access to internet connection and digital devices than those living in rural areas of Greece, where practical issues of access may be more relevant. In previous studies, differences in the use of internet have been reported between urban and rural populations in Greece (Alexopoulos et al., 2010; Koutsouris, 2010; Michailidis et al., 2011). Therefore, the findings presented in this study ought not to be generalised and the need to conduct further research, encompassing students from other urban and rural areas of Greece in order to

provide a more holistic account of Greek young people's social media practices, should be highlighted. Similarly, it is acknowledged that findings on future aspirations may differ for students growing up in a rural context. However, the present study will focus on evidence provided by the urban context of Athens, acknowledging that future research including young people living in rural areas may offer a more comprehensive overview of these issues.

CHAPTER 3: Developing identities and future aspirations in the digital age: An overview of the literature

The aim of this chapter is to provide a critical review of the relevant theoretical concepts and of previous research on young people, their identities and their future aspirations in the digital age. The first part draws on earlier work about youth and their use of social media platforms in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the contemporary social context in which young people grow up, with a particular focus on the online practices that are embedded in their everyday lives. The following sections present a conceptualisation of the notions of 'identity' and 'future aspirations' with reference to relevant theoretical approaches taking into account the opportunities and challenges of the digital age. The last part of this chapter examines previous discussions of social inequalities and aims to develop an understanding of the new meanings these divides acquire in the digital age.

3.1 Growing up in the digital age: Changes and challenges

The emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) has increasingly mediated all aspects of young people's lives as they engage daily in multiple online practices in various spaces such as their homes, schools and communities, but also 'on the move' through the use of portable devices and wireless connection (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Lauricella et al., 2014; Michikyan and Suarez-Orozco, 2016). As the integration of these technologies in young people's lives has changed the context in which they are growing up, there has been increasing interest in exploring, conceptualising and understanding the opportunities and the risks being created in the digital era. Furthermore, contemporary studies on youth, digital media and education aim to investigate how these changes influence various aspects of young people's development (Erstad, 2013; Erstad et al., 2016; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016).

Since the purpose of the current study is to explore young people's online practices on social media platforms and their relation to identities and future aspirations, the following

sections will discuss previous studies about the use of social media by young people and the implications which arise from their engagement with these online platforms.

3.1.1 Defining Social Media

Various terms are used in the literature to define the notion of social media platforms, such as 'social networking sites', 'social media', 'social networking platforms' and 'online networks'. Since online communication technologies have been growing rapidly during the past few years, more online platforms, sites and applications are being created (e.g. Facebook, 2004; YouTube, 2005; Twitter, 2006; Tumblr, 2007; Instagram, 2010; Pinterest, 2010; Snapchat, 2011; Vine, 2013) which provide users with the ability to communicate and interact with others online, and to create, share and view online content.

According to boyd and Ellison (2008: 211) a 'social networking site' is:

> A web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

This term, defined by boyd and Ellison (2008), has been widely used in previous works in this field, but as the online technologies have been evolving rapidly, this definition appears to be mainly related to websites and online pages. Nevertheless, the emergence of smartphone applications has resulted in the need for a broader definition in order to capture the notion of the newer online technologies and their affordances[4]. In a more recent definition of social media, boyd (2014) argues that this term refers to the social networking, video sharing and (micro)blogging websites and platforms which were developed after the year 2000 and which enable users to participate by creating and sharing their own content online. This more recent definition of social media conveys the new

[4] This term has been discussed in section 1.1.1.

meaning more adequately. Unlike older definitions, it does not conceptualise social media by seeing them partially, as just ‘networking websites’ where there is only communicative interaction between their users. Instead, the updated definition of social media incorporates a variety of online platforms, applications and tools that enable online communication, and highlights the agentive potential provided to their users through the ability to create and share online content. Similarly, as Hughes (2009: 5) briefly suggests, social media can be defined as all ‘technologies that enable communication, collaboration, participation and sharing’.

3.1.2 Young people’s engagement in social media

Current research on engagement with social media indicates that young people have been using extensively online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat as part of their daily practices (Ofcom, 2015; Smith and Anderson, 2018). Although more extensive and longitudinal research in relation to young people's engagement with social media platforms has been conducted in the U.S., research in this field has been growing during the last decade in Europe as well. Therefore, it has been acknowledged in the European context that social media usage has become part of people's daily practices.

According to the 2015 report from the Pew Research Centre, 92% of young people in the U.S. are going online daily, with 24% almost constantly engaged in activities online and 71% using more than one social network site (Lenhart, 2015). According to the same report, 56% of 13-17 years olds connect online several times a day. In the 2018 report published by the same research centre, it has been identified that 45% of teens reported being almost constantly online, hence the number has almost doubled since 2015 (Anderson and Jiang, 2018; Smith and Anderson, 2018). In the British context, recent research data in relation to young people's online activities underline the fact that social media platforms are being actively used by them (Ofcom, 2016). It has also been indicated that users aged 16-24 are more likely to undertake online activities on a weekly basis.

Moreover, in the same age group (16-24) there is an increase in weekly engagement in all online communication activities (e.g. looking at social media sites/apps, using instant messaging, uploading/sharing videos online, sharing links/articles and contributing comments). It is also noteworthy that this age group demonstrates the highest percentages of weekly usage in comparison to all other age groups.

Several publications and reports have appeared in recent years documenting the adoption of social media and online practices among all age groups and highlighting the extensive use of these platforms by young people (EU Kids Online, 2012; Lenhart, 2015; Ofcom, 2016; Anderson and Jiang, 2018). Because of the evidence regarding the wide use of social media platforms by young people, research has focused on exploring, identifying and understanding the types of online practices that young people engage in while using these online platforms and the implications of these practices for their lives.

Findings from the Digital Youth Project (Ito et al., 2008b) have provided interesting suggestions in relation to the genres of participation by young people in online networks. The project adopted an ethnographic approach to explore young people's new media engagement practices. Its aim was to explore 'the media ecology that young people inhabit' without isolating 'the specific affordances of digital production tools or online networks' (Ito et al., 2008b: 8). That project examined young people's engagement in various types of media (described as 'new media'), reporting communication through social networking sites as one of the online activities in which young people engage. The report from the Digital Youth Project by Ito et al. (2008b) has focused on identifying the genres of participation in 'new media' as used by young people, but also on the implications that these activities have for education. The socio-cultural approach of this study considers young people as social actors and rejects a 'vulnerable' image of youth and childhood. The results indicate that young people engage in new media by developing multiple types of participation which vary according to the nature of their online practices

(e.g. online messaging/creating and sharing content online etc.) and the purpose they serve (Ito et al., 2008b). These genres of participation are divided into friendship-driven (interactions with peers) or interest-driven (specialised activities related to personal interests) (Ito et al., 2008b).

The Digital Youth Project offers a useful insight into the typology of young people's online activities. Nevertheless, it leaves space for further research in relation to the implications of these online practices and the ways that these activities may influence the process of identity formation during adolescence. In relation to the use of social networking sites, boyd (2014) has extensively studied young people's online activities in the U.S. to identify the ways that teenagers use these platforms. According to her research, by embracing technology teenagers are attempting to imagine new possibilities and find ways to participate in public life as well as to take ownership of their lives. In particular, her work highlights the importance of understanding young people's online activities. According to her line of argument, social media are not perceived as just a distraction but as a space where young people express their hopes, dreams and struggles.

Similarly, the EU Kids Online Project (EU Kids Online, 2014) has provided rich data about children's and young people's Internet use, activities and skills as well as about online safety and parental awareness issues by studying a large sample of children and young people (9-16 years old) living in 33 European countries. The updated results of the final report of this project indicate that children are going online more often, in more diverse ways and at younger ages. In relation to social media practices, the authors of this report have identified that connecting to social networking sites and communicating through instant messaging are among the most frequent online activities of this age group.

Therefore, it appears from the research findings discussed above that the use of Internet, and social media platforms in particular, has intensified during recent years. The adoption of various online social media practices among young people raises questions about how

these practices change their everyday experiences, as well as about the ways of living and learning in the digital age. Hence, further research is needed to provide deeper and more thoughtful insight into the ways the embedded everyday media practices relate to the development of identities (Lankshear and Knobel, 2007; Kaare, 2008; Schofield and Kupiainen, 2015). So far, however, there has been little discussion of how social media online practices, in particular, are being embedded in young people's lives, especially in the Greek context. Nevertheless, to better understand the challenges faced by young people in the digital age, it is important to consider the particularities of the wider social context that they are growing up in.

3.1.3 Contemporary conceptions of young people as vulnerable or as social actors: The need to move beyond a dualistic view

In the contemporary context of the global North, where young people and children have access to digital media in various spaces (at home, in school, etc.) from a very young age, it seems that by having access to information and by engaging in creation of content, young people can develop their sense of agency to a greater degree than in the past (van Dijck, 2009; Greenhow, 2010; Code, 2013). Although most previous research exploring young people's online practices has considered them solely as recipients of knowledge and information, some studies have focused on young people's role as producers of online content which may facilitate aspects of personal agency (Greenhow, 2010). However, this view can be challenged by studies which discuss issues of inequalities of access and of the quality of digital media use by social groups with different socio-economic characteristics (Hargittai, 2002, 2010; van Deursen and van Dijck, 2010, 2014). Hence, in the digital age, theorising the notions of 'youth' and 'childhood' have become complicated tasks.

As Craft (2012) argues, there are two main perspectives in theorising about youth and childhood: on the one hand seeing children and young people as being at risk, or on the other hand seeing them as being empowered in the contemporary context.

Since the early 2000s and the emergence of digital media tools in everyday life, young people have been denoted by various terms which all emphasise the impact of growing up in a context characterised by digital innovations. Terms such as 'the app generation', 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), 'Generation M' (Roberts et al., 2005), 'net-generation' (Tapscott, 1998; Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005), 'Millenials' (Lenhart and Madden, 2005), 'iGeneration' (Carlson, 2005), and 'late Millenials' (Zemmels, 2012) have been used in media and youth studies to describe contemporary youth and to highlight the distinction between different generations of young people. Media research in the past has traditionally viewed young people as a 'special' social group in need of protection from the potential risks and harms presumably associated with the use of social media (Zemmels, 2012). In the digital age, however, young people are also considered to be the early adopters of various media, digital tools and online services, who are developing new ways of interacting.

The emergence of digital technologies and the wide use of digital media tools by young people have led to an emerging power shift, as this early access to various tools, services and information can disrupt the existing power relations between the authority of adults and the voice of young people, and can lead to a recognition of the agentic role of young people as innovators and active participants in the social and political sphere (Ito et al., 2008a; Ito et al., 2008b).

Both views of young people, as being at risk and as being empowered, influence the development of varied assumptions about the role and impact of engagement with digital tools and virtual interactions (Craft, 2012). By adopting a perspective which views young people as being at risk, digital tools and engagement in online practices can be considered as potentially harmful activities from which children and young people should be protected with the help of adults. In contrast, by adopting a perspective that views young people as

empowered, the emphasis is placed on the liberating opportunities that media can offer (Buckingham, 2007).

Adopting one or the other viewpoint seems to lead to a dualistic and polarised view of youth, as each follows a deterministic technological approach which either rejects or idealises the role and impact of digital media in the lives of children and young people. As there is relatively limited research about the ways and the reasons that young people engage and make meanings with new media in their everyday lives (Zemmels, 2012), it is important to expand our understandings in relation to these issues. Simply investigating and questioning how media influence children and young people is an approach that can provide only a partial understanding of the contemporary context. Exploring the ways and the reasons why young people engage with the types of media that they use daily may offer new perspectives on the complexities of the context in which young people develop their identities and interact with others.

3.2 Conceptualising identity in the digital age

The development of identity during adolescence has been described by many researchers as a crucial process. Various approaches aim to theorise the notion of 'identity', a term which has been characterised as complex and difficult to conceptualise. Philosophical, psychological and sociological approaches have sought to capture the notion of 'identity' and have discussed the process of developing identities.

Several theoretical approaches to identity in relation to youth have been concerned with psychological aspects of identity development during adolescence, emphasising the internal, personal and psychological processes of identity development (Marcia, 1966; Erikson, 1968; Vignoles et al., 2011). In Erikson's (1968) work on identity and youth, the process of identity development is described as a period of crisis during adolescence. These theories offer a sharp insight into the psychology of young people. However, they do not appear to take into account the importance of the social context in which the process of

identity development takes place. For the purpose of this study, since developing an identity is considered not an individualised but a collective and social process (Lawler, 2014), the approach to conceptualising identity will follow a socio-cultural perspective.

Hence, from that perspective, the notion of identity will be conceptualised by emphasising the influence of the social context and social interactions on identity development. This does not imply that the importance of the individual's personal agency will not be acknowledged. On the contrary, in following a socio-cultural perspective an attempt is made to theorise identity by acknowledging both the implications of the social context within which identity is developed and the role of the individual's agency in this process.

3.2.1 Socio-cultural approaches to identity in the contemporary context

Sociological approaches to identity emphasise the relationship between the individual and the social context, acknowledging the importance of the social interactions and relationships in developing the notion of the 'self'. Identities are seen as being socially constructed; and as Lawler (2014: 2) suggests:

> Instead of seeing identity as something located 'within' the person – a property of the person, we might say – I consider it as something produced through social relations.

This conceptualisation reflects a social constructionist perspective as it acknowledges the fluidity of the process of identity development and also recognises the impact of social factors such as the broader social context in which each person belongs, as well as the social interactions in which the individual is involved (Koole, 2014). From this perspective, identity is understood not as a stable characteristic of the self, but as fluid and subject to change across different contexts. As Hall (1996: 4) argues, identity can be understood by acknowledging broader socio-cultural characteristics, since it is 'constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions'. It is also argued that individuals have a repertoire of various identities and they will use each

of these, or a combination of them depending on the social context in which they find themselves (Hall, 1996; Ross, 2007). Identities are conceived of as being 'constantly constructed and asserted through discourse' (Archer et al., 2003: 13).

Discussions of identity have become even more complex during the twenty-first century, due to the particularities of the contemporary social context which has been characterised by greater social fluidity than in the past. Following Bauman's (2004) argument, the fluidity of the notions of gender and nation in late modernity has led to a greater fluidity in the concept of identity. As he highlights, the globalised world and the increased sense of uncertainty that people experience nowadays have revealed the fluidity that characterises the notion of identity as well.

Along with the fluid notion of identity, the contemporary social context is shaped by the notion of 'individualisation' (Beck, 1992), as people have to make decisions and choices about various aspects of their lives; hence they have a greater responsibility to manage their own lives. As argued by Bauman (2002), 'individualisation' transforms the process of identity development into a 'task' and not a 'given', charging them with the responsibility to perform this task. This leads to people enjoying new freedoms but also feeling the pressure to take responsibility for their own mistakes (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). According to Giddens (1991: 5-8), in late modernity 'the self' has become a 'reflexive project' because individuals need to constantly make choices regarding their lifestyles, careers and consumption.

Within the context of 'individualisation' in late modern society, young people have been presented by the media as a 'me generation', holding a strong interest to be seen in the media and to engage in activities which suit their individual life projects by following norms about their appearance and lifestyle (Birdwell and Bani, 2014: 29; Twenge, 2014). Thus, in order to understand and conceptualise the identity development processes of today's young people, it is important to investigate the ways in which both 'offline' and

‘online’ discourses in this contemporary context may influence their identities. Since the use of social media has become embedded in their everyday lives and their ‘online’ experiences are tied to their ‘lived’ experiences, it is important to explore how their online practices relate to the process of identity development. The following section draws on previous research about young people’s media practices with the aim of identifying the implications of these practices for the process of identity development.

3.2.2 Young people and media: Implications for identity development

As previously mentioned, researchers view the period of childhood and adolescence as crucial for the development of identity. Several studies which refer to identity in the context of the digital age have focused on investigating the implications and the role of digital media and online platforms in the identity development process of young people and children (Buckingham, 2008; Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011; boyd, 2014; Gardner and Davis, 2014). The broad use of digital media in general by young people has raised questions about the ways in which young people develop their identities and imagine their future-selves (Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). Although identity is a complex term to capture, it is acknowledged that focusing on it is important, because it encompasses issues of personal development and social relationships, both issues being crucial for achieving an understanding of the development of young people (Ito et al., 2008a).

The relationship between young people and media has been extensively explored and discussed in the works of David Buckingham (Buckingham 2000, 2007, 2008; Ito et al., 2008a). Buckingham’s approach, following a sociological perspective, acknowledges the opportunities and the limitations offered to young people by their use of new media. He argues that it is important to consider the ways in which young people use the resources offered by new media to express their identities. However, he also highlights the

importance of considering the differences in the use of these resources by different people, which may emerge as a result of age, gender, ethnic and social differences.

Buckingham, but also many other researchers in the field of youth, digital media and identity, have used Goffman's (1959) work on impression management to conceptualise the notion of identity in relation to media. Goffman's (1959) 'dramaturgical theory' on identity performance emphasises the idea that people attempt to create impressions about themselves and impose them on others so as to achieve desired goals, a process he refers to as 'impression management'. This approach to identity and this particular concept, have been used in several studies about identity performance and representations of the self in online environments. The attention paid specifically to 'impression management' processes tends to focus on the ways that people represent themselves online and on whether these online representations refer to 'real' aspects of their identities. However, little has been written from this theoretical perspective in relation to the ways that online practices influence or relate to identity.

Following a socio-cultural approach to identity development can offer a detailed insight into how people create a sense of identity through their use of media. A socio-cultural approach to the development of identity is based on the assumption that the meaning that people create for themselves derives from their everyday experiences and practices and the reflections they create about them, which are then used to create their personal narratives (Foley and Ching, 2012). Therefore, the everyday practices that young people engage with in social media can similarly be regarded as part of the everyday experiences that young people reflect on and which can potentially contribute to the creation of their personal narratives.

Narrative approaches to identity have been used to understand the identity development process by studying the narratives that young people create with various types of digital media. Through a narrative approach to identity development in relation to digital media,

the notion of 'agency' is highlighted. Studies in this area have tried to explore the opportunities offered to young people through digital media to exert their agency and construct narratives, taking the role of active creators and producers of media content (Potter, 2012). This approach also focuses on the learning opportunities that are created using digital media and on the development of a learner identity.

Personal narratives and the notion of personal agency are both related to the informal learning activities in which media users are being involved (Code, 2013; Erstad et al., 2013). Identity, agency and learning are terms which are interrelated. Much of the previous research has been concerned with the informal learning practices in which young people engage through their use of media tools, and also with the relation of these practices to the development of new skills. Studies on new literacies emphasise the importance of considering the functions and implications of digital literacies along with the printed kind (Greenhow and Robelia, 2009a; Greenhow and Robelia, 2009b). Research in this field has been growing in recent years in order to provide an understanding of the learning experiences across various media contexts.

Like the connected learning approach of Erstad (2013), which attempts to explore the interconnections between the various learning spaces where young people develop their skills and identities, Barron's (2006) notion of a 'learning ecology' tries to explore the connections between the contexts where learning occurs. According to Barron (2006: 195), the term 'learning ecology' refers to 'the set of contexts found in physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning'. Therefore, these studies draw attention to the need for a connected view of learning and identity development, having recognised that these processes occur in various contexts which are interrelated.

In relation to the effects that the affordances of digital media and online applications may have on young people's sense of identity, Gardner and Davis (2014) argue that since young people are immersed in apps, they have developed a view about themselves as 'packaged

selves' and the world as an 'ensemble of apps'. The term 'packaged selves' refers to the development of identities that are more externally oriented and objectified and which have quantifiable values (Gardner and Davis, 2014). The main argument presented in their work emphasises the concern that, although digital media and online applications can offer young people new opportunities for self-exploration and personal expression, on the other hand the strong ties created between media affordances and identity development may lead to a limited and unfulfilled sense of identity, as they do not leave enough time for offline exploration of the self. Similarly, Lanier (2010) describes digital technological tools as being extensions of people's selves and argues that these tools and the practices people engage in while using them can lead to shifts in identities and to changes in the perceptions we hold about ourselves.

The relationship between online and offline practices and identity is considered an issue worth investigating in greater depth, as the wide use of smartphones and other mobile devices, which has become very popular during the past few years, has led to a blurring of the divide between online and offline boundaries. The emergence of mobile devices and the integration of online interactions in everyday communication practices has blurred the distinction between online and offline spaces, especially for young people who are growing up in the digital era. The use of mobile internet devices has enabled the conduct of online interactions while moving through physical spaces (de Souza e Silva, 2006). The widespread use of mobile devices and the ability that they offer users to be constantly connected and engaged in online practices has led to an important shift in the ways that young people make sense of the divide between online and offline environments and has also influenced their everyday experiences. Therefore, one of the important challenges in seeking to understand how young people develop their identities nowadays is to explore and identify the connections that are being created between these online-offline 'lifeworlds' (Erstad et al., 2013).

3.2.3 Social media engagement as a daily practice: 'Being' online and offline

The blurring of the divide between online and offline environments and interactions, as has been explained above, has led to changes in young people's everyday experiences and in the types of practices which can influence the ways their identities are being developed. As engagement in social media practices has become a daily practice for the majority of young people, it is crucial to explore how these online practices in particular may relate to their identities.

Social media platforms have an especially close relationship to identity as they provide space for presentation of the self and social interaction. As Papacharissi (2011: 307) describes it, with reference to the interactions which are enabled through social networking sites:

> The flexibility of online digital technologies permits interactions and relations among individuals within the same networks or across networks, a variety of exchange ties, variable of frequency of contact and intimacy, affiliation with smaller or larger, and global or local, networks formed around variable common matter.

Previous research in the field of online social media platforms and youth has mostly concentrated on aspects of online representations of the self and identity performance (boyd, 2014; Gardner and Davis, 2014). These studies have explored the ways in which young people choose to represent themselves in online platforms, the 'real' or 'performed' characteristics that they choose to present online about themselves and the types of practices that they prefer to engage with. In an attempt to conceptualise the development of an online identity, Greenhow and Robelia (2009a) argue that, within social media platforms, the process of creating an online profile has a direct impact on the performance and reinforcement of identity. They argue that by creating their online profiles, young people are able to develop an image of how they would like other people to see them but

also how they view themselves (Williams and Merten, 2008; Greenhow and Robelia, 2009a).

Moreover, boyd (2007) has identified the aspects which differentiate online from offline self-representation. She argues that online identities on social media platforms are persistent (since their electronic characteristics can be stored), searchable (since other people can search for specific names and places), and replicable (since electronic characteristics can be easily duplicated or modified); in addition, online profiles can be visible to audiences which are invisible to the users, so that several characteristics of an online identity may be interpreted in a different context from the one intended by the user.

These approaches contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways that the affordances of online social media platforms enable users to represent themselves online. However, little attention has been paid to the investigation of how the affordances of online social media platforms and online practices may relate to the identities of young people.

> Since Internet, computer-mediated communication and social software have become interactive spaces and places for communication, there has been a need to know how this non-face-to-face communication affects our daily communication and shapes both our identity and social identities.
>
> (Jakala and Berki in Warburton and Hatzipanagos, 2013: 6)

Therefore, it is meaningful to further expand research in this area by exploring how these online practices may influence the ways in which young people make sense of themselves and develop their identities.

In relation to social media and young people in particular, Subrahmanyam and Šmahel (2011) argue that it has become clear that we should view digital worlds as a social context that young people are immersed in, along with the social contexts of the family, peers and schools. Consequently, this argument can refer to the online contexts of social media

platforms in particular. Social media practices are interconnected with offline life and although the notion of identity is fluid, it is influenced by social forces (Burnett and Merchant, 2011). The online and offline social contexts are experienced by young people as linked and interconnected to each other (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011). Given the understanding that the divide between online-offline contexts is blurred for young people growing up in the digital age, it seems necessary to explore the process of identity development in the interconnection between online and offline social contexts, rather than focusing on a dualistic view of identity in either online or offline social contexts.

The use of social media platforms has led to a transformation in the social practices that young people employ in order to interact with others and maintain relationships with their peers (Zemmels, 2012). Discussions of social media engagement have endorsed the view that in the digital age identity construction relies upon fluid interactions among individuals who are connected through networks which exist in situated contexts (Kimmons, 2014). Social media platforms are among the situated contexts in which young people connect to each other and participate in various social practices. According to Manovich (2001), through social media people develop their identities by negotiating between aspects of their offline selves and of the online representations that they create through their use of digital and online structures.

One of the primary differences between engagement in traditional digital media and contemporary engagement practices on social media platforms is the notion of ‘participatory culture’ (Jenkins, 2009). The online social media platforms, apart from enabling social interactions, have also offered users the opportunity to express their personal voices by taking active roles in the creation of online content (Jenkins, 2009). This shift from being ’consumers’ to becoming potential ‘creators’ of online content indicates the agentive role that users of social media platforms can play. Following a socio-cultural perspective, online social media platforms can be conceived of as online contexts

where communication and identity expression are facilitated using online tools, and in this context, agency can be enabled through the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Code, 2013). The participation of young people in the networked publics of online social media platforms can shape their social practices and therefore the development of their identities. In consequence, it has been argued that various types of online activities such as posts or comments in these platforms may be associated with specific identities (Fuller and Malina, 2005). According to Loveless and Williamson:

> The potential of 'DIY media' is understood to empower young people in a do-it-yourself ethic or creative collaboration, production and participation which puts the emphasis on the autonomy, agency and creativity of users (Knobel and Lankshear, 2010), or, as they have been fondly neologized, 'pro-sumers' and 'prod-users' (Bruns, 2008).
>
> (Loveless and Williamson, 2013: 64)

The engagement of young people in online social media practices has also expanded the studies on media literacy (which were presented in the previous section) by generating discussion of literacy within the social media context. Various studies have started to explore the learning opportunities that are created through the use of social media (Burnett and Merchant, 2011). Through use of the term 'social media literacy', the focus is not only concentrated on digital skills that young people develop through the use of these platforms; in addition, a social media literacy approach 'offers a developmental account of how children gain understanding as they mature' (Livingstone, 2014: 285).

However, this area of research is expanding and only a limited body of work concentrates on the ways that young people develop their identities through these online platforms. Burnett's and Merchant's (2011) critical approach to social media literacy provides a useful model for understanding social media practices, as it focuses on the notions of

practice, networks and identity. The same model also considers how online contexts intersect with offline ones. This approach provides a useful overview of young people's online social media practices (circulating information, seeking advice/support, co-ordinating actions on social issues, enhancing personal relationships, and sharing occupational/educational activity) and its potential benefits. An important issue that is raised, however, by the aforementioned study is the reproduction of social inequalities through these online environments, a problem which will be discussed in depth in the following section.

3.3 Conceptualising social inequalities in the digital age

3.3.1 The various dimensions of the digital divide

As research on youth and online digital media use has been growing, discussions around the 'digital divide' have also unfolded. The multiple dimensions of this notion in the contemporary context are being explored by a number of scholars (e.g., Hargittai, 2002; Hargittai and Kim, 2012; Park and Lee, 2015).

Initial discussions of the 'digital divide' were focused on unequal access to digital tools and devices in terms of availability. Other works have focused on the issue of generational differences between older adults and younger people, discussing the gap between the digital skills of people who belong to different generations, and how it affects parenting (Herring, 2008). However, the emphasis of discussions on the 'digital divide' changed rapidly from concern about access to digital media to concern about digital skills and the 'possession' of knowledge in relation to the creative use of these technologies (Barron, 2004). The wide use of the Internet and the emergence of smartphones have contributed to a widening of access to digital tools for a greater number of users, including less affluent social groups. These changes have shifted the focus away from issues of 'access'; hence the notion of the 'digital divide' has taken a more complex form.

> Since the coining of the phrase 'digital divide', the discourse has rapidly shifted from a concern about who has access to new information technologies to who will have the knowledge that will position them to design, create, invent and use the technologies to enhance their personal lives and social worlds (Castells, 1996; New London Group, 1996; Reich, 2002).
>
> (Barron, 2004: 1)

The more recent, multiple dimensions of the 'digital divide' relate to issues of access to particular types of information and applications (Park and Lee, 2015). This gap is believed to lead to unequal access to resources and knowledge, resulting in limited opportunities to develop skills and also narrowing down the opportunities for some social groups to participate in various social practices (Jenkins, 2009; Hargittai and Kim, 2012). With reference to the use of social media platforms, it has been argued that people from different social groups have become frequent users after the emergence of affordable smartphone devices; therefore, an issue of inequalities in access does not seem to be relevant. Interestingly, recent research results from a Dutch study have indicated that people who are characterised by a lower educational level tend to connect online more than people of medium or high educational level; however, the two groups practise different types of usage (van Dijck, 2005; van Deursen and van Dijck, 2014).

Hence, there is a need to focus on the variations in users' engagement practices on social media platforms, as there seems to be a wide range of differences in the extent, scope, and types of usage and the particular networks with which users engage (Burnett and Merchant, 2011). A deeper understanding of the relationship between identity and participation within online spaces needs to be achieved and, as argued by Kimmons (2014: 93), we ought to better understand aspects of identity and literacy within social media platforms in order to 'consider how embedded values of such media influence social participation and identity construction within them'. It is interesting therefore to explore whether and, if so, how

social inequalities are being reproduced in the online contexts of social media platforms by expanding or limiting opportunities for users.

3.3.2 Social inequalities in the digital age

Although this study focuses on exploring the ways that social media practices relate to young people's identities and future aspirations, it is also important to look at the broader social context within which young people are growing up, because their practices take on meaning through the context of use. The notion of the 'digital' has been at the centre of public attention in discussions of contemporary society, but it is not just the emergence of new technologies and platforms which change between the present and previous generations (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). Discussions of contemporary society have evolved along with discussions of the processes of globalisation and individualisation.

'Individualisation' refers to the structural changes which have occurred in the relation between society and the individual and has become a key concept in contemporary sociology (Rasborg, 2017). Beck (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002a), Giddens (1990, 1991, 1998) and Bauman (1988, 2000a, 2000b, 2002) have discussed the notion of 'individualisation'. Despite some theoretical differences, they concur that increasing individualisation constitutes an important characteristic of the structural transformation of modern society (Rasborg, 2017). According to late modernity theories, people are charged with growing responsibility to make choices about their own risks and manage their own futures. The emphasis is on the notion of choice, along with the options provided in late modernity and the perspective of social change (Beck, 2013, 2016).

By contrast, the sociological approaches of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1987; Dean, 2003) argue that social inequalities, social class and power relations are still apparent in contemporary society. In the digital age, by conceiving of access to technological innovations, engagement in online networks and access to online resources as factors

related to one's social and cultural capital, we can understand that these practices may empower or limit individuals. The concepts of social and cultural capital in Bourdieu's (1990) terms refer to the social relations and networks and, accordingly, to the resources and knowledge that an individual can draw on. Bourdieu's (1990) notion of 'habitus' emphasises the importance of the social context and social interactions. In relation to the empowering or restrictive effect of 'habitus' on individual agency, it is argued that:

> The habitus, as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted … this is because the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1990: 77)

Among late modern theorists, the persistence of social class and social reproduction has been debated. It has been argued that the norms of gender and social class are being rewritten (Giddens, 1995), while individualisation has been described as a process by which people's everyday lives are becoming detached from the structures of gender, social class, nationality and religion (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002b). Although it is recognised within these theoretical approaches that inequalities persist, they emphasise the non-class character of these individualised inequalities (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002b). Therefore, although terms which characterise different social classes ('middle class', 'working class') are still being used, as discussed in Section 2.3.1, their meaning is changing as they refer to a loose notion of social status which enclose forms of cultural knowledge, social capital and practices (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016).

The debate between proponents of social reproduction and individualisation theories has created questions which go beyond the scope of the present study. Both theories argue that social inequalities persist; therefore, importance is placed on finding ways to conceptualise

contemporary social processes. One of the main research questions of the present study explores how young people from different social locations engage in social media practices and develop their identities and future aspirations. The analysis and discussion of the findings will draw on discussions around the aforementioned debates, taking into account both the role of social structures and the implications of individualisation in contemporary society. The present study, recognises the influence of social structures on the lives of individuals, but also acknowledges individuals' agency and their ability to resist their positioning along traditional gender, social class and ethnic divides (Moreau, 2015).

Previous studies which have explored issues of inequalities in the digital age and differences in the use of digital media by different social groups (Ellison et al., 2010; Greenhow and Burton, 2011; Ellison et al., 2014a, 2014b) have used Bourdieu's (e.g. 1986, 1990, 1992) work to emphasise the role of the social context. Reay (2004) suggests in her analysis of 'habitus' that it is a concept which can be employed to discuss how social inequalities are being reproduced through daily interactions:

> Habitus can be used to focus on the ways in which the socially advantaged and disadvantaged play out attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority ingrained in their habitus in daily interactions.
>
> (Reay, 2004: 436)

The notions of 'habitus' and 'capital' have been used in previous studies to investigate how young people's dispositions are shaped though online interactions (Ellison et al., 2010; Greenhow and Burton, 2011; Ellison et al., 2014a, 2014b). These studies have suggested an association in which the use of social media platforms may provide a powerful context for social capital exchanges. In addition, they have argued that online interactions are complex because they can be meaningful and expansive, but they can also be restricting.

As indicated in Section 3.3.1, earlier research findings on the digital divide have focused more on issues of access and have demonstrated that the quality of access was increased in households characterised by higher socio-economic status, as they had broadband internet connection and there was evidence that young users from these households were able to take up more opportunities online (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007). Moreover, socio-economic background appears to play an important role as well, as it has been indicated that people from lower socio-economic groups tend to consume rather than produce content, than people from more affluent groups (van Dijck, 2005). As argued by Shaw and Hargittai (2018), a pipeline of online participation exists because despite that many people engage in participatory media, engagement in the networked public sphere is limited by knowledge gaps.

Contemporary theoretical approaches to issues of inequality have used the notion of 'intersectionality' (Collins and Bilge, 2016) in order to study and investigate social and educational inequalities. The term has been widely used in recent educational and social research. Intersectionality is described as a way of providing an understanding of the complexities of individuals' experiences in contemporary society, taking into consideration various factors that shape them (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Regarding social inequalities issues, the emphasis of this analytical approach is on investigating the combination of various factors that may shape inequalities, such as gender, social class, race etc.

As the issue of the digital divide has shifted from inequalities of access to inequalities in the development of digital skills and usage patterns (van Deursen and van Dijck, 2014), it is crucial to investigate the contemporary notion of the digital divide by exploring the inequalities that may exist online in relation to a combination of various factors. Exploration of the types of tools and practices that young people have access to in various spaces such as home and school and through their communities and peer groups may offer

a deeper understanding of their 'learning ecologies' and of the opportunities which they do or do not encounter (Barron et al., 2007).

With reference to social media platforms, the issue of inequalities may relate to inequalities in the development of new literacy skills or in other learning opportunities. Although social media platforms may be considered by some as spaces where young people just interact in order to have fun and socialise, the following view highlights how out-of-school online spaces can provide space for learning and development of digital and new literacies skills:

> What authors such as Jenkins (2006) term 'new literacies' are developed and applied in digital cultural practices which young people employ particularly in leisure spaces, often without any family or school accompaniment. This is replaced by collaboration between peers in non-formal and informal learning communities.
>
> (Ballano et al., 2014: 148)

Educational researchers have been interested in studying online practices developed through social media platforms, as it is believed that participation in these networks may provide various opportunities such as peer-to-peer learning and development of skills which will be valued in workplace environments (Jenkins et al., 2007). However, this argument indicates that these opportunities can be created for those who have the knowledge to participate fully in these platforms (Kimmons, 2014). The importance of developing digital and new literacies skills, as well as having access to online resources and networks, is emphasised in the contemporary social context of the digital economy. European policy initiatives (Commission of the European Communities, 2007) and OECD reports (OECD, 2016) express, among their central educational aims, the aim of development of digital skills, which is considered a prerequisite for young people's ability to participate actively and successfully in the job market as adults later on.

In relation to the implications that the digital divide may have for issues of employment and the widening or narrowing of future occupational options, it is interesting to explore how young people shape their future aspirations and which factors influence their decisions. In the next section, the concept of young peoples' future aspirations will be analysed, taking into consideration the context of the digital age and the various factors that contribute to the shaping of these aspirations.

3.4 Conceptualising future aspirations

3.4.1 Why study future aspirations?

Future aspirations can be understood as offering insight into how young people imagine themselves in the future, bringing in the surface aspects of their identities, as well as insight into the extent to which these aspirations are shaped by social or other factors. According to Archer et al. (2014) it is important to study young people's aspirations because, firstly, they usually offer an indication of future occupational attainment; secondly, they are the central focus of educational policy papers and practices; and thirdly, because studying aspirations offers a sociological perspective on the interplay between individual agency and social structures.

The concept of future aspirations is closely related to the issues of widening participation in higher education and to educational policy papers. Various European educational policy papers describe one of their main aims as encouraging young people to 'aim high' and raising their educational and occupational aspirations (HMTreasury and DCSF, 2007; HMGovernment and DCSF, 2010), since future career development has been positively correlated with the development of higher aspirations during teenage life (Schoon et al., 2007; Croll, 2008; Mello, 2008; Ashby and Schoon, 2010; Staff et al., 2010).

However, the conceptualisation and definition of aspiration has been contested (Hoskins and Barker, 2017). Aspirations have been used as an element of political discourses which aim at the remake of working class as middle class (Allen, 2014). The concept of 'aiming

high' raises questions of whether this is feasible and beneficial for all social groups and whether young people with different social characteristics can attain their goals even if they do aim high. With reference to the level of aspirations of young people from disadvantaged social groups, there have been arguments supporting the view that high aspirations may prove to be beneficial for these social groups as well, as they contribute to building resilience (Flouri and Panourgia, 2012). On the other hand, there are opposing voices, especially in relation to the contemporary social context, which emphasise that the concept of 'aiming high' creates obstacles for young people rather than benefitting them, as it oversimplifies the complex conditions of young people's lives (Zipin et al., 2015).

The social context that young people grow up in plays a crucial role in the development of their future aspirations. Previous studies have identified not only the importance of the school context in shaping young people's aspirations (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2011), but also the role of socio-economic status and perceived social class (Eshelman and Rottinghaus, 2015). Howard et al.'s (2011) study on the influence of gender, socio-economic status and race/ethnicity on young people's career aspirations indicated that there are significant effects and interaction between these variables (young people from lower socio-economic status were more likely to aspire to occupations of lower prestige and regarding the types of aspirations, several participants' choices reflected 'traditional' gendered patterns).

In the contemporary social context where young people shape their future aspirations, it is particularly useful to explore the factors that influence them, as the conceptions of professional success have become highly individualised. In the neo-liberal context, it has been observed that young people's perceptions of work and aspirations are evolving around an individualised notion of success, emphasising the importance of the individual's hard work (Mendick et al., 2015). This focus on the individual entails the risk of failing to acknowledge the importance of social or other inequalities which widen or restrict future

opportunities. The implications of individualistic views in the globalised world are briefly described here:

> This individualism leads to a key governmentality of recent times: that individuals must take responsibility, as lifelong learners and entrepreneurs of the self, to navigate their own achievement of well-being (Rose, 1999), or they have themselves to blame for becoming 'wasted lives' (Bauman, 2004) who deserve rebuke, not welfare, as drains on the social whole (the aggregate of 'individuals').
>
> (Zipin et al., 2015: 229)

Young people, in the contemporary social context, often face the responsibility of navigating their lives and making choices for themselves and their futures. The individual is responsible for developing skills and expanding his/her social networks in order to broaden career opportunities and to participate actively in the job market. This context emphasises individual agency, shifting the responsibility for success or failure mainly onto the individual, and underrating the importance of the social context. Education and skills development have also become highly individualised, and as McDonald et al. (2011) explain:

> Education and training have been extended, identity is increasingly shaped through leisure and consumerism and youth are expected to plan and navigate their life trajectories in highly individualised ways.
>
> (McDonald et al., 2011: 69)

Another important aspect of the contemporary social context in which young people shape their future aspirations is the fluidity and uncertainty that characterises the digital age. In this age, the stable institutions that could provide stability in the past are now withdrawing their 'safety nets' (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). Therefore, the responsibility of managing their lives becomes a burden for the individuals and for the young people in

particular, who have to make important choices. Hence, future aspirations are being shaped in a context which is quite complex, and it is important to explore the factors that shape them and how inequalities may be reproduced in the process.

In this context, which is characterised by uncertainty, young people's future aspirations seem to be affected. Recent studies have found that young people's occupational aspirations tend to be unclear, a condition which can either lead to self and role exploration or to aimlessness (Staff et al., 2010). Since social scientists have indicated that there is a positive relationship between high occupational aspirations and future occupational attainment, it is important to investigate in greater depth the types of aspirations that young people develop, the factors which influence them, and whether this relates to young people's social locations.

3.4.2 Types of aspirations

Studies in relation to aspirations draw on a range of theoretical frameworks, with some for example following a structuralist approach, others following an environmental approach (focusing on the context in which the individual develops future aspirations), and others following a pragmatic approach that acknowledges the importance of context, structure and chance in life events (Payne, 2003; Rose and Baird, 2013). There are also various definitions related to the term 'future aspirations', which is sometimes used interchangeably with the term 'future expectations' or 'ambitions'. However, these terms do not have the same meaning, as the term 'expectations' refers to a more realistic view of what someone is expecting to happen in the future, whereas 'aspirations' may imply idealistic thoughts about what someone would like to achieve in the future (Ashby and Schoon, 2010). Educational aspirations are related to the academic goals of an individual, whereas occupational aspirations are related to professional goals and the choice of a particular profession.

Realistic aspirations can be linked to what young people think they will probably be able to achieve in the future, whereas idealistic aspirations may be linked to what young people would like to achieve. The concept of aspirations can also be conceived as an aspect of identity, since it can reflect how young people see themselves in the present and in the future by imagining their future or 'possible selves' (Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman et al., 2006). Identity research has in fact discussed the correlation between well-developed cognitions of oneself or of the future or possible self and positive educational and occupational outcomes (Prince, 2014). It has been argued that the concept of 'possible selves' can be expanded by the expectations that young people have about their future, as it can reveal options and possibilities that they haven't considered before in relation to themselves (Rose and Baird, 2013). Although the development of future aspirations seems to be a personal task for the individual, it is essential to consider the factors that influence the development of certain types of future aspirations.

Before focusing on the factors that have been linked to the formation of future aspirations, it is vital to refer to the socio-cultural approach to conceptualising aspirations provided by Zipin et al. (2015: 241), who theorises aspirations as 'complex formations, deriving from multiple social-cultural groundings, including ideological and material-historical dimensions of the present and verging future'. This approach also refers to resources for future emergent aspirations that are based on funds of knowledge which derive from young people's lived experiences and create what Zipin et al. (2015) define as 'funds of aspirations'. Therefore, this approach highlights the socio-cultural dimension of the concept and underlines the importance of the context in which individuals develop their aspirations.

3.4.3 Factors affecting the development of future aspirations

Previous research on the factors that contribute to the development of future educational and occupational aspirations has been mostly focused on the role of family, peers and

socio-economic factors. In relation to socio-economic status, the view has been expressed in recent research findings that young people tend to have high aspirations (for example, to continue their studies at higher education institutions) regardless of their socio-economic background. However, it is also stated that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to revise these aspirations later in life (Chowdry et al., 2009; Rose and Baird, 2013). In addition, there is literature supporting the key role of socio-economic status in the development of future aspirations (Reay et al., 2005; Rothon et al., 2011; Schoon and Polek, 2011).

Previous research has found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds develop high aspirations but tend to lack the family, social and economic capital to achieve their aims and fulfil their potential (Ball et al., 2000; Brown, 2011; Allen, 2014; Hoskins, 2017). Social class background, in particular, can significantly affect what is possible for working-class young people, regardless of how high their aspirations may be (Allen, 2014). Reay et al. (2005) and Crozier et al. (2008) have provided evidence against the deficit view of disadvantaged young people's aspirations, showing that they develop high aspirations which are constrained by degrees of choice related to their family background, their parents' occupations and the policy context.

Furthermore, parental educational level, and therefore the family environment, has been identified as another important factor in the development of future aspirations, with findings showing that young people whose parents have higher levels of education develop higher aspirations (Ashby and Schoon, 2010; Strand, 2011). The importance of the social factors which influence the development of young people's future aspirations is apparent in several studies which indicate that these aspirations are strongly influenced not only by community norms and values, but also by the type of information young people are exposed to (Bandura et al., 2001; Akos et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2014a). Young people's exposure to attitudes of parents and friends, along with their personal experiences,

influences the shaping of their future aspirations (Akos et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2014a). For example, the kinds of careers that young people encounter in their everyday lives may influence their perceptions of the range of futures which are possible for them (Ellison et al., 2014a).

In addition, Bourdieu's (1986, 1990, 1992) concepts of habitus and capital have been employed in previous studies to provide an analytic theoretical lens through which to understand individuals' sense of their future as formed through their relationship to the social context (Archer et al., 2012; Archer et al., 2014). The findings of these studies indicate that aspirations fall into gendered, classed and racialised patterns and highlighted the crucial role of 'family habitus' and capitals in shaping children's perceptions of their choices and aspirations.

Research into the career aspirations of young people from different ethnic groups has provided conflicting findings (Howard et al., 2011). A variation in young people's aspirations depending on their ethnic group is identified but it is questioned whether these differences between ethnic groups reflect socio-economic status differences. Regarding the development of high educational aspirations by young people from ethnic minorities in the British context, it has been argued that these may be driven on the one hand by the anticipation of discrimination in the labour market and on the other hand by the belief in education as a crucial route to upward social mobility (Khataab, 2018).

Gendered differences have been identified in several previous studies on educational and career aspirations; however, the research findings are conflicting (Howard et al., 2011). Considering the role of gender in shaping aspirations, it is argued that in relation to educational aspirations, girls are more likely to remain in education (Rothon et al., 2011; Gutman and Schoon, 2012), whereas in relation to occupational aspirations they tend to develop lower aspirations, aiming at less prestigious jobs due to cultural norms (Raffaele Mendez and Crawford, 2002; Shapka et al., 2006; Ashby and Schoon, 2010).

Gender inequalities in the job market have been related to differences in job preferences and gender-typical job aspirations which stem from cultural beliefs about gender and which frame boys' and girls' perceptions about their career choices (Correll, 2001; Ashby and Schoon, 2010). Nevertheless, evidence has also been found that teenage girls are as likely as boys to aspire to a managerial or professional job (Francis, 2002; Schoon, 2006; Schoon et al. 2007; Mello, 2008). Hoskins (2017) discussed gendered differences in her qualitative analysis of young people's aspirations and constructions of their futures, arguing that boys were more likely to aspire to a career which would attract status, whereas girls were more likely to aspire to a career which would make a difference to other people's lives.

As mentioned earlier, the interaction of socio-economic status, ethnicity/race and gender influences has a significant effect on the development of future occupational aspirations (Howard et al., 2011). Hence, an intersectional approach could provide an understanding of the complexities of developing future aspirations, taking into consideration various factors that shape them. Although previous research has provided insight into the importance of socio-economic status, gender and other characteristics of the social context in which young people grow up, it has been acknowledged that the factors influencing the shaping of young people's future aspirations have still not been thoroughly investigated (McCoy and Bowen, 2015), especially in the digital age. Thus, the present study aims to contribute to the aforementioned findings by further investigating how social location factors (such as gender, ethnicity, parental educational level and type of school) may relate to the development of future aspirations as well as to how they may intersect with each other.

3.4.4 Future aspirations in the digital age

As discussed previously, it has been acknowledged that the social context, social interactions and personal experiences are all important factors in shaping young people's future aspirations. However, the role of social media practices has not yet been intensively

investigated. Previous research on the relationship between future aspirations and digital media has mainly developed around two areas.

One area of research has focused on the ways access to knowledge of technology, along with acquisition of digital skills, relate to higher occupational attainment and academic achievement (Cooper and Weaven, 2003; Mossberger et al., 2003; Goode, 2010). This area of studies relates to aspects of the 'digital divide' and mainly focuses on occupational attainment rather than on future educational or occupational aspirations.

The other area of previous research about future aspirations in the digital age has evolved around the impact that media images have on young people's aspirations and the reinforcement of particular types of aspirations through certain media images (Allen and Mendick, 2013; Harvey et al., 2015; Mendick et al., 2015). This area of research has placed particular emphasis on the impact that these media images have on young girls' aspirations, highlighting several gender-related issues. These studies have also focused on the notion of 'celebrity' that is dominant in online social media discourses. The findings of these studies mostly focus on young people's understandings and values in relation to the concepts of 'professional success', 'hard work' and 'celebrity' (Mendick et al., 2015).

Interestingly, these findings indicate that young people's narratives about work, success and failure have shifted from the structural towards the more personal and intimate. The following insight, as expressed by the contributors to this research project, provides an understanding of how inequalities seem to have become increasingly obscured in the contemporary social context:

> We have problematized this investment in hard work, showing how it operates within broader neoliberal practices, which celebrate entrepreneurialism and individualism, whilst obscuring inequalities that limit who can go where in education and the liberal market.

(Mendick et al., 2015: 175)

Although this area of studies offers useful insights into the impact of media images on young people's aspirations and understandings of the notions of 'work' and 'occupational success', there is still a significant lack of previous research about the ways that social media practices relate to the shaping of young people's aspirations for the future, especially in the Greek context. As discussed in Chapter 2 ('Conducting research in the Greek context'), Greek young people have been classified among the most active Facebook users in the European context (Haddon et al., 2012), thus researching the relationship between social media practices and future aspirations may provide useful insights into the process of developing future aspirations.

Recent studies have started to explore whether social networks developed online on social media platforms may influence young people's educational aspirations. More specifically, social media use has been identified as significant for developing the college aspirations of first-generation college students[5] (Wohn et al., 2013). Ellison et al.'s (2014a) research project on investigating adolescents' future plans in relation to their online and offline experiences has been the only significant piece of research which aimed to explore the relationship between social media practices and future aspirations. This study investigated the experiences and aspirations of 43 high-school students in the U.S. in order to identify how these young people are exposed to different career paths by their offline and online experiences. The results of this research project indicated that online social networks provided meaningful experiences when they involved exposure to new and different kinds of people and resources (such as gaining access to information, asking for help from online friends and also providing help, co-ordinating with friends from online social networks and accessing friends of friends through online network ties). However, this small-scale study

[5] First-generation college students: Students who were the first members of their families who managed to attend college.

cannot provide substantial evidence about the ways that online social media practices relate to the shaping of future aspirations.

In the contemporary context it is considered important to explore how social media engagement and everyday online practices influence the development of educational and occupational aspirations, as this issue has not been thoroughly investigated in existing research, especially in the Greek context. Considering that social media practices are embedded in young people's everyday lives and these online contexts can constitute spaces for shaping meaningful personal experiences, it seems necessary to expand research in this area. As discussed in the previous sections, young people engage actively in online social networks and platforms, spaces where they actively engage in social interactions and where they can potentially gain access to various resources and online content which may impact on the ways that young people imagine their future selves and frame their aspirations.

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

This chapter aims to describe the research methods employed in this research project and to discuss the various methodological issues that have arisen during it. The rationale of the present study will be discussed to justify the choice of the particular research methods and their relation to the research questions[6]. In addition, the research design will be presented along with the ethical considerations that underpin this study.

4.1 Research approach

4.1.1 Epistemological and ontological positions

The present study follows a mixed-methods approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), employing both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the research questions. It follows a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) which will be discussed and justified in detail in the following sections.

The choice of methods used in this study has been made after considering which methods would best serve in answering the study's research questions. The research questions determine the design of a mixed methods research (Cohen et al., 2018). Mixed methods research, according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), combines quantitative and qualitative data in one study with the aim to provide a deeper understanding of the research questions than a quantitative or qualitative approach would achieve on its own (Creswell, 2013).

The ontological position of a mixed methods paradigm recognises that social phenomena are complex, hence qualitative or quantitative methods can only provide a partial understanding (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, the ontological position of the present study rests on the belief that social phenomena are multifaceted and knowledge about the social world can be created by combining qualitative and quantitative methods throughout the process

[6] The research questions have been presented in Section 1.2.

of data collection and analysis. The present study employs quantitative and qualitative methods in order to provide more holistic answers to the research questions, therefore the epistemological position of the present study is underpinned by a 'pragmatist paradigm' (Ercikan and Roth, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Cohen et al., 2018). Pragmatism is focused on solving the practical problems and practical implications of the social world (Robson, 2011). The focus is not placed on the debate between qualitative or quantitative approaches but rather focuses on the aims of the researcher and the research questions (Feilzer, 2010; Cohen et al., 2018).

The present study follows an inductive process, starting by exploring participants' perspectives in order to develop theoretical concepts which are also informed by the literature. The aim of the study is to explore young people's online social media practices and the ways that these practices relate to the development of their identities and future aspirations. Thus, the aim is to provide an understanding of social reality by investigating the interplay between individuals and their social practices, taking into account the views and perspectives of the individuals.

4.1.2 Methodological approach: Mixed-methods

The present study can be characterised as interdisciplinary because it draws on previous work in the fields of media, youth and education. Hence, there are multiple and diverse research approaches used in previous projects which investigated factors related to online practices and youth. Before describing in detail the approach of the present study, a summary of the research approaches used in previous studies will be discussed.

Earlier studies have used qualitative methods such as interviews or ethnographic approaches to explore and understand aspects of young people's online social media practices (Ito et al., 2008b; Vitak and Ellison, 2012; boyd, 2014; Ellison et al., 2014a; EU Kids Online, 2014; Gardner and Davis, 2014; Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). In addition, there are quantitative studies using questionnaires, which draw

on psychology-driven approaches to the concept of youth identity development and its relation to social media practices (Subrahmanyan et al., 2008; Subrahmanyan and Šmahel, 2011; Wohn et al., 2013; Michikyan et al., 2015).

The EU Kids Online (2011-2014) research project has provided an integrated cross-cultural analysis of qualitative and quantitative findings about children's and young people's online experiences in 33 countries. Moreover, the Net Children Go Mobile (Mascheroni and Cuman, 2014) research project followed a mixed-methods research approach using a survey in 7 European countries and combining interviews and focus groups in 9 European countries to investigate children's mobile internet use implications. In the U.S. context, a mixed-methods approach has been employed in Greenhow and Burton's (2011) study which investigated low-income students' online social media engagement in relation to their emotional well-being and social capital. The present research aims to contribute to the aforementioned studies by following a mixed-methods approach.

For the purpose of the present study, the chosen methods were decided upon after considering the particularities of the research questions. Hesse-Biber and Johnson (2013) recognise the crucial role of the research questions in the mixed methods research design and argue that research problems usually require the use of multiple approaches. Hence, it was concluded that a mixed-methods approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) would best serve the purposes of this study. A mixed-methods approach to research involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Creswell (2010), mixed-methods research is characterised by persuasive and rigorous collection of both qualitative and quantitative data based on the research questions of the study.

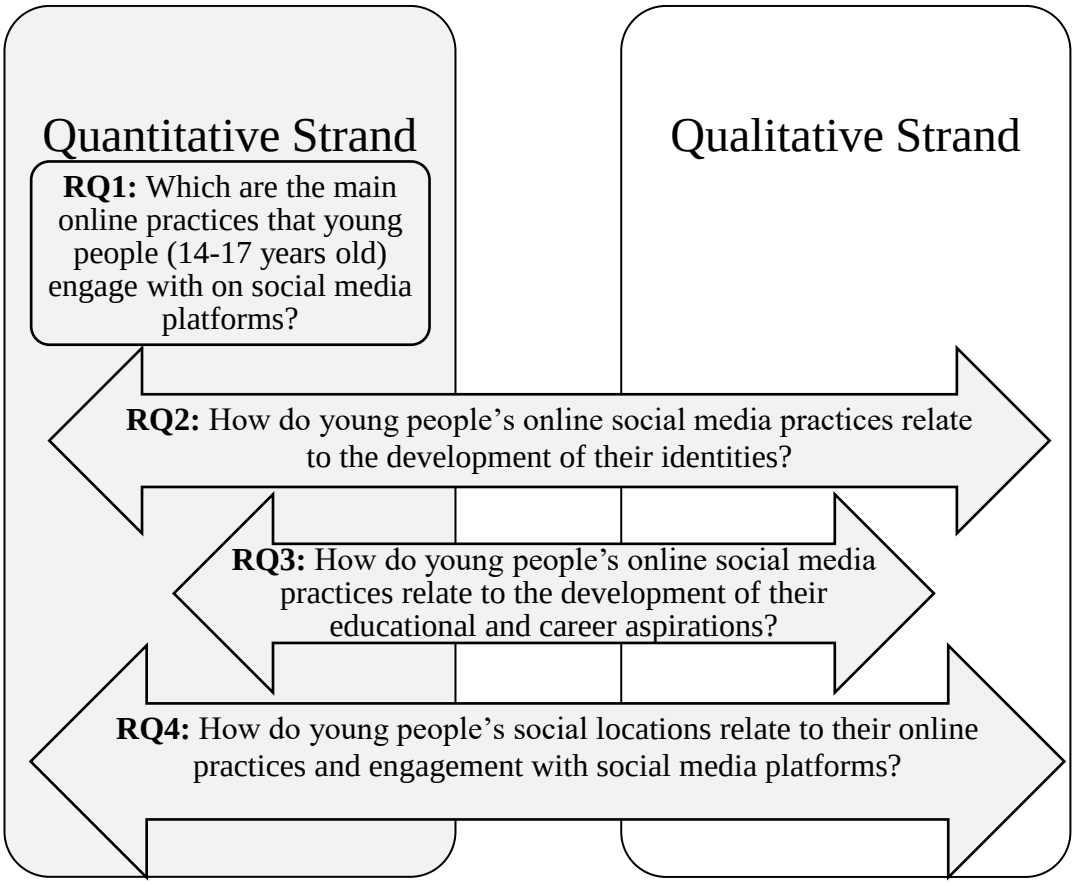
There are various types of mixed-methods design which are characterised by differences in the level of interaction, the timing, the priorities and the mixing of qualitative and quantitative strands of the research (Creswell, 2010). The design of the present mixed-

methods study consists of a quantitative phase which is followed by a qualitative phase. In accordance with Creswell's (2010) typologies of mixed-methods research designs, this study's design can be characterised as an explanatory sequential design. Hence, the two phases occur sequentially, starting with the collection and analysis of the quantitative data, and following on with the collection and analysis of the qualitative data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) describe that in an explanatory sequential design quantitative data are collected before the qualitative data. However, the findings from both phases will be combined and discussed in the final stage of the study. In the following section, the stages of each phase of the research design will be explained.

4.2 Research rationale and design

A mixed-methods approach to the research design has been chosen as the most suitable for the purposes of this study due to various factors. First and foremost, as explained in Section 4.1, a mixed-methods approach has been selected because of the nature of the study's research questions. In order to further explain and justify this choice, it is crucial to refer to each of the research questions and their relation to the development of this particular research design. The following figure offers an overview of this study's research questions in relation to the two strands of the mixed-methods design.

Figure 4.1: Mixed-methods strands in relation to research questions



The first research question (RQ1) seeks to explore the types of online practices in which young people engage and the frequency of their engagement in social media practices. Therefore, it aims to provide a descriptive account of young people's online social media practices. Taking into account the gap that has been identified in previous research into young people's engagement in social media platforms in the Greek context, it was decided that there was a need for the collection of quantitative data in this area, and therefore, that this particular research question would be investigated by developing a questionnaire.

Furthermore, the questionnaire included some questions aimed at gaining an initial insight into whether young people view their online social media practices in relation to their identities (RQ2) and their future aspirations (RQ3). (The details of the questionnaire's structure will be discussed in section 4.3.1.)

Nevertheless, in order to explore in depth the ways that online social media practices relate to the development of participants' identities (RQ2), semi-structured interviews have been

considered the most adequate method. In order to explore this relationship between online practices and identities, it is necessary to get a deeper insight into the participants' personal views and experiences. Hence, it is believed that this can be achieved through the conversational context of a semi-structured interview. In addition, semi-structured interviews have been regarded as the most suitable method for exploring young people's future aspirations in relation to their online social media practices (RQ3), because young people's views will be more thoroughly expressed through a personal discussion. A semi-structured interview aims to provide an understanding of the themes of everyday life as those are experienced from the interviewees' own perspectives (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015). The choice of semi-structured interviews in particular will be discussed in detail in section 4.3.2 of this chapter.

In addition, it is believed that the relationship between the social locations and online social media practices (RQ4) can be more thoroughly investigated by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The development of a questionnaire enables the collection of data on the social locations of the participants (ethnicity, parental occupation and educational level) whereas semi-structured interviews with students from different social locations may provide a better understanding of their online social media practices and their views on them.

Therefore, the research design comprises a questionnaire along with semi-structured interviews with a selected sample of participants. The quantitative phase is designed to offer a general overview of the types of online social media practices and the level of engagement of young people in various online social media platforms, whereas the qualitative phase is designed to provide deeper insight into the relation of this engagement to participants' identities and future aspirations. Nevertheless, the quantitative strand of the research design interrelates with the qualitative one. The questionnaire was used to select the sample that participated in the semi-structured interviews. Hence, the research

instrument of the quantitative phase functioned as a recruitment tool for the qualitative phase. In addition, sections of the questionnaire included questions which provided an initial insight into young people's views concerning their future aspirations and the ways that their online practices relate to their identities. Thus, the questionnaire provided quantitative data in relation to aspects which were then investigated in depth during the qualitative phase.

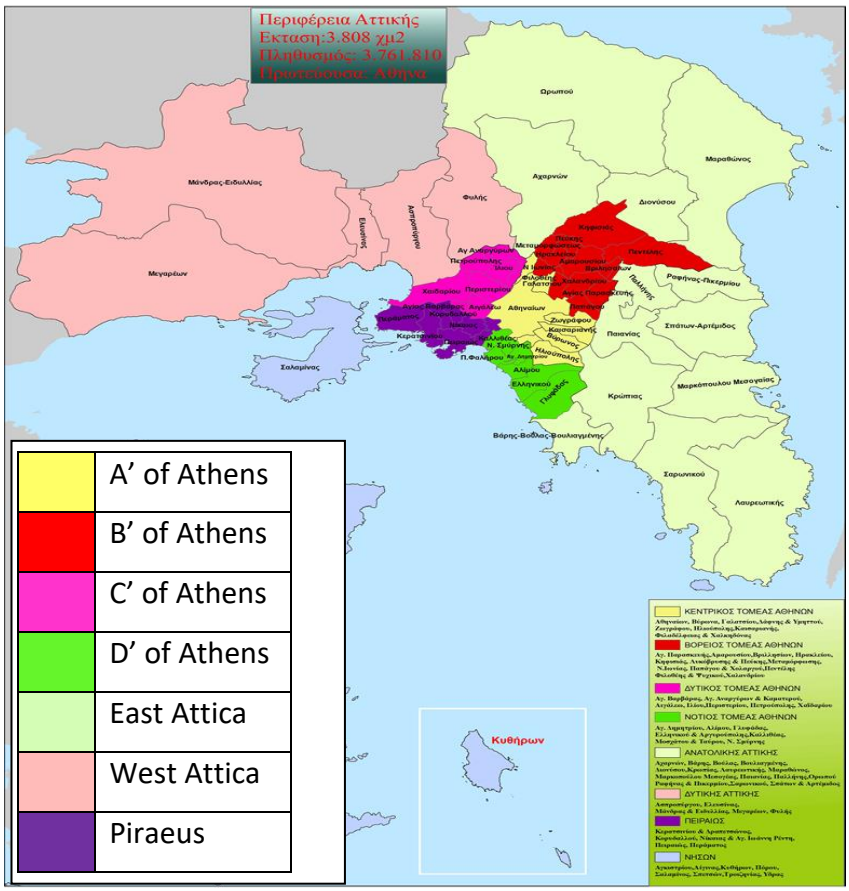
Before presenting the research instruments that were developed, it will be useful to describe the sampling strategy that was used in this study. This will help to clarify the relationship between the research questions and the chosen methods.

4.2.1 Sampling strategy

To begin with, the target population for this study are young people living in Greece, aged between 14-17 years old. The reasons for conducting this study in Greece have been explained earlier, in Chapter 3 ('Developing identities and future aspirations in the digital age: An overview of the literature'). The specific age group (14-17 years old) has been chosen because previous research reports in other countries have indicated that the most active users of social media platforms belong to this age group (Lenhart, 2015; Ofcom, 2016). In addition, since another aim of this study is to explore young people's aspirations, it is thought that young people who are currently at high-school level may have developed more solid ideas about their future and would be able to express more clearly their views concerning their aspirations.

For practical reasons, such as the limited timeframe for completing this study, it was decided to recruit the participants from schools located in Athens only. Athens is the capital and largest city of Greece with a general population estimated at over 3 million citizens (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2014). Since the age group of the target population of this study involves adolescents between 14 and 17 years old, the most effective recruitment strategy was to contact students through the high schools that they attend. The high schools of Athens are distributed in seven district areas. These areas are depicted in the map provided here and all areas belong to the wider district of Attica. Therefore, in order to achieve a diverse sample of young people in Athens, it was decided to include in the sample students from all district areas.

Figure 4.2: District areas of Athens/Attica (source: Municipality of Attica official webpage, www.pat.gov.gr/site/index.php)



Apart from the geographical distribution of high schools among the seven district areas, the variety of types of high schools that exist in the Greek context has been taken into account for the selection of this study's sample. Before referring to the selected sample's details, a brief description of the high school types will be provided.

In the Greek educational context, apart from the division between state and private high schools, there are other divisions within the category of state high schools. After

graduating from lower secondary education, students can choose to continue to general or vocational education (CEDEFOP, 2014). The majority of the student population attend the state funded high schools (also known as GEL in Greece) which enable them to take the national university entry examinations in the final year of their studies for admission to either a Higher Educational Institute (also known as AEI in Greece) or a Technological Educational Institution (TEI). The duration of studies in the general high school is three years in total. There are also state funded evening high schools which operate during the afternoon and are for working students.

Vocational high schools (also state funded and known as EPAL in Greece) which are also state funded offer vocational training to students, for a total of three years. Students graduating from the vocational high schools gain a vocational upper secondary school leaving certificate, which is equivalent to the general high school certificate, and also a specialisation diploma (CEDEFOP, 2014). Vocational high school graduates can participate in national examinations for admission to a Technological Educational Institution (TEI). Equivalent to the evening high schools, there are also state funded evening vocational high schools operating during the afternoon for working students. However, it has been observed that in the Greek context vocational education is the second choice for most students as it 'attracts low performers, who for the most part come from lower economic brackets' (CEDEFOP, 2014: 17). Taking into account the aforementioned particularities of the Greek upper-secondary educational institutions, it was decided that both state, private evening and vocational high schools would be invited to participate.

For the completion of the questionnaire, a non-probability sample was employed because of the small-scale of the research. The decision regarding the sample size in a research project has been described as a problematic process since it is a deliberative and reflexive issue (Cohen et al., 2018). In determining the sample size, the population size but also the error margin should be taken into consideration (Cohen et al., 2018). An online sample size

calculator, using a confidence level of 95% for a student population of 3 million, estimated that the required sample size for completing the questionnaire would need to include 384 participants. Assuming a 50% response rate, it was decided that 800 questionnaires would be distributed. A list which included all high schools in Athens (state, private, state evening, state vocational) was provided by the Greek Ministry of Education. The high schools that were invited to participate in the study were selected according to their geographical location, including in the sample at least one school from each of the 7 urban/suburban districts of Athens (purposive sampling technique).

According to public data, the number of general state high schools in Athens is 297, private high schools number 58, state vocational high schools 72 and state evening high schools 35. The numbers are produced by counting the schools of each type from the list of high schools in all district areas provided by the official records of the Greek Ministry of Education (Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Attica, 2016). Therefore, by involving a sample size of 10 schools in the administration of the questionnaire, a contrasting sample of 400 completed questionnaires was expected (the aim being a collection of approximately 40 completed questionnaires from each school). Of the 56 high schools that were invited, 10 agreed to participate. The successful participation of these 10 schools resulted in the collection of 463 completed questionnaires. The sample of 10 schools which participated in the completion of the questionnaire included 5 state high schools, 2 private high schools, 2 state evening high schools and 1 state vocational high school. The number of schools participating in the study from each of the aforementioned school types was decided on after considering that the majority of the student population attend state high schools.

As one of the aims of this study was to provide a comparative perspective across students from different social class backgrounds, the sample included a number of students from

state, private, evening and vocational high schools. The methods of conducting a comparative analysis will be discussed later, in section 4.4.3 about analysis techniques.

Before presenting the research instruments and analysis methods used in this study, the purposive sampling strategy for participation in the semi-structured interviews will be explained. Purposive sampling is often used by researchers in order to select the cases to be included in the sample based on the specific characteristics that meet the needs of the research project's aims (Cohen et al., 2018).

The questionnaire was used as a recruitment tool for the follow-up interviews. A total number of 92 students (who had already participated in the completion of the questionnaire) were invited to participate in the interviews. Participants from all types of schools were invited in order to ensure that the sample of the follow-up interviews would include young people from different social locations. Of the students who participated in the questionnaire completion, a number of approximately 10 students from each school were invited to participate in the interviews. These students were among those who reported in the questionnaire that they were more active online. More specifically, from each school, students who reported being connected online almost constantly were selected. It is believed that young people who are more active online would be able to offer a deeper and more detailed insight into their online practices and into the relationship between their practices and their identities and future aspirations. Hence, the sample selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews proceeded the questionnaire sample and was influenced by participants' responses in the questionnaire phase. As argued by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), in sequential mixed methods sampling different types of samples succeed and influence one another.

Nevertheless, in some of the participating schools, where a large number of students reported being connected online constantly, additional criteria were taken into account in order to achieve a more purposeful sample selection for the interviews phase. In this case,

the participants who were invited to the interviews were among those who also reported in the questionnaire using a larger number of social media platforms in total and for multiple reasons, as well as those who reported that they express aspects of themselves through their online practices and that their future aspirations relate to these practices. In total, 45 students (from six of the participating schools) agreed to take part in the semi-structured interviews. This sample included students attending all types of schools and the specific characteristics of each of the participants are presented in Appendix V[7].

4.3 Research instruments

4.3.1 Questionnaire

The use of the questionnaire as a research tool in this study was aimed at identifying the types of social media platforms that young people use, the types of online social media practices in which they engage, and their frequency of use (RQ1). The questionnaire is a research instrument which is widely used for the collection of survey information (Cohen et al., 2018). According to Robson (2011), the use of a questionnaire or an interview is the recommended method for investigating participants' everyday activities. Young people's online social media practices can be conceived as part of the participants' everyday activities and therefore a questionnaire was developed in order to explore them. As mentioned earlier, there is a remarkable gap in previous research about the online social media practices of young people in Greece; hence, the questionnaire was chosen as a preferred research instrument because it can be administered to a larger number of participants and therefore can provide richer findings.

The questionnaire was printed and self-completed by the participants in each school. Considering that not all schools offered advanced online services and IT facilities, it was decided that a printed version could be distributed and collected faster through the researcher's school visits and that this would also ensure a higher response rate. The

[7] The constraints and limitations in relation to the sample of the present study are discussed in Section 8.2.

questionnaire was designed on the basis of the research questions that this study aims to answer. After reviewing previous research projects, it was determined that there were no available research instruments being publicised, with the exception of the EU Kids Online questionnaire which, however, had a broader focus as it aimed to investigate young people's online experiences on the Internet in general (Livingstone et al., 2015). The layout of the EU Kids Online questionnaire provided a prototype for the design of the present study's questionnaire in terms of format only and not in terms of content.

The questionnaire was organised in six sections (see Appendix II and III) and its objectives were designed taking into consideration the main aims of the present study in order to formulate its specific questions (Cohen et al., 2018). The first section requested information about participants' gender and age. The following section included questions related to the types of online social media platforms that participants use and their frequency of use, as well as the types of practices in which they engage and the types of devices they use to connect to social media platforms. In order to enable the participants to mention any additional social media platforms or types of online practices they engage with, all relevant questions included an option to fill in additional information if they wished to. The third section of the questionnaire included questions, the answers to which would provide insight into participants' personal views on the relation between their social media practices and their sense of identity. This section was added to the questionnaire to gain insight into young people's views about the relationship between social media practices and their identities. As mentioned, participants' answers in this section were taken into account when planning invitations to the interview phase.

The fourth section of the questionnaire consisted of three questions about young people's future aspirations, while the fifth section included questions which investigated whether participants engaged in any educational uses of social media platforms. These sections have been designed to provide insight into young people's future aspirations and to explore

whether social media platforms are being used for educational purposes or for exploring their future educational opportunities. The final section of the questionnaire requested information about parents' ethnicity, educational level and occupation. This section enabled the collection of data about students' social location.

The following table provides an overview of the specific questions that were included in the questionnaire, their relation to each of this study's research questions, and their analytic use. (The complete questionnaire is available in Appendix II and III.)

Table 4.1: Questionnaire questions in relation to research questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	**QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS**	**ANALYTIC USE OF QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS**
RQ1: Which are the main online practices that young people (14-17 years old) engage with on social media platforms?	- Do you have an account on a social media platform? (YES/NO) - Which of the following social media platforms do you currently have an account with? (Tick as many boxes as needed: Facebook, Instagram, etc.) - On a typical week, how often do you use each of the following social media platforms? - On a typical day, how often do you connect to your accounts on the social media platforms that you use the most? - Which device do you use to access your social media accounts? - Why do you use social media platforms? (Tick as many boxes as needed: To keep in touch with my friends, to read the news, to share pictures, to share my thoughts, to make new friends, etc.) - I have used my accounts on social media to read the news. (YES/NO) - I have used my accounts on social media platforms to connect to accounts with educational or scientific content. (YES/NO) - I have used my accounts on social media platforms to get information about or connect to Universities or Colleges. (YES/NO)	• Identify users/non-users of social media platforms. • Identify types of social media platforms that students are using. • Identify frequency of use of social media platforms (daily/weekly). • Identify types of devices used. • Explore types of online social media practices. • Explore potential educational uses of social media platforms.
RQ2: How do	How true is this of you (NOT	• Explore the

young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their identities?	TRUE/A BIT TRUE/VERY TRUE)? A. I use my social media accounts to express aspects of myself. B. I get inspired about how I imagine myself in the future by things I have seen on social media platforms. C. My online social media profiles reflect who I am. D. The social media platforms that I use have helped me discover new interests.	relation between online social media practices and young people's identities.
RQ3: How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their educational and career aspirations?	How true is this of you (NOT TRUE/A BIT TRUE/VERY TRUE)? A. I want to get into University when I finish school. B. I have decided on the profession/career that I want to pursue when I finish school. C. Something that I have seen on social media platforms (profiles/posts/discussions etc.) has made me think about my future career aspirations.	• Explore young people's future aspirations and their relation to online social media practices.
RQ4: How do young people's social locations relate to their online practices and engagement with social media platforms?	- Information about parents' ethnicity, occupation and educational level.	• Identify characteristics of students' social location.

Before describing the design of the interview guide, it should be mentioned that each questionnaire was assigned a unique numeric code. The questionnaires were anonymous (following the ethical guidelines of the Greek Institute of Educational Research); therefore, the numeric code which was assigned to each questionnaire was used to trace back the students who would be invited to the interview phase. The head teacher of each school had each of the students' names assigned to each code. However, the researcher did not have

access to the names of the students. Therefore, in order to invite the participants to the interview phase, the researcher sent the head teacher of each school the numeric codes of the students that she wished to invite to the interview phase along with the consent forms for the interviews, and the head teachers contacted the students. All ethical considerations will be discussed in detail in Section 4.5.

4.3.2 Semi-structured interview guide

As previously mentioned, semi-structured interviews have been conducted to explore in depth young people's views and perceptions about their online social media practices and future aspirations. By choosing interviews as a data collection method in a research project, it is believed that knowledge can be generated through conversations between individuals (Kvale, 1996). Through the interviews, participants are enabled to discuss how they interpret everyday situations according to their personal viewpoints (Cohen et al., 2018). The choice of conducting semi-structured interviews (rather than in-depth or structured interviews) was based on the belief that the semi-structured design allows the interviewer greater flexibility, as she can add or modify the questions in order to fit the different needs of each participant. Semi-structured interviews contain some indicative questions following a sequence of themes which they aim to cover (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015). In addition, semi-structured interviews aim to obtain 'descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena' (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015: 150). In a semi-structured interview, the general themes of the questions are specified but the questions are open-ended and the order of the questioning sequence can be changed in order to tailor the responses of each participant (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, a semi-structured interview design allows exploration of specific aspects of participants' views which may be different for each student.

In a semi-structured interview, the interview guide includes the themes which should be covered during the interview process and it is designed to reflect the research questions

(Newby, 2014). In the present study, the interview guide has been organised in two parts. The first set of interview questions was thematised by including questions about young people's online social media practices whereas the thematic focus of the second set of interview questions was on participants' future aspirations. The initial questions of the interview were introductory, inviting the participants to describe aspects of their use of social media platforms. Follow-up questions were also included in order to expand the discussion about the relation of these online practices to participants' identities and future aspirations. Moreover, probing questions were employed in the case of participants who provided answers which did not elaborate their views clearly.

The following table shows the interview questions that were included in the interview guide in order to investigate each of the research questions of this study. (The complete interview guide is available in Appendix IV.)

Table 4.2: Interview questions in relation to research questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**
RQ2: How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their identities?	• Which are the main social media platforms that you use? • Which are the main reasons for using each of these platforms? • Which aspects of yourself do you usually share online? (Interests? Experiences? Opinions?) • Do you post frequently on social media or are you more interested in what other people are sharing? • Have you ever seen something on social media platforms that made you think differently about what you are dreaming/thinking about the future? What was it? What did you think about it? • Have you ever seen something on social media platforms that changed the way you see yourself in general? What was that? Did it change the way you see yourself in a positive or negative way? How did it change your views? • Have you ever seen something on social media platforms that someone else did or posted about and made you think that you would like to do something similar? What was it? What did it make you think? • Do you feel that you have learnt something or discovered a skill/interest through your use of social media? If yes, what was that and how did you discover it? Did you develop it afterwards?

RQ3: How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their educational and career aspirations?	• What are your goals after finishing school? Have you already thought of what you will do next? • How do you imagine yourself after finishing school? What would you like to do? • Have you decided on a specific profession? Have you thought about your future career? • How did you decide on your future career aspirations? Have you been inspired by someone/something about your decision? What or whom has influenced your decision? Have you thought of any other options? • Have you ever been inspired about what you want to do in the future by something that you have seen online on social media (ex. Facebook, YouTube etc.)? How did it inspire you? • Have you ever been discouraged about what you want to do in the future by something that you have seen online on social media (ex. Facebook, YouTube etc.)? What was that? Why did it discourage you? • Have you used social media platforms in order to learn something new? What was that? • Have you used social media platforms about something related to school or lessons/homework? How? • Have you used social media platforms to explore your educational or career options? How did you explore them? • Are there any obstacles in imagining your future career? What are they?

To sum up, it should be mentioned that for both research instruments, the participants' age group was taken into account in the process of designing the instruments. The questions in both research instruments were expressed in a simple and clear form and instructions were given in print but also orally in order to ensure participants' understanding. The questionnaire in particular was designed to include icons of the social media platforms that were mentioned in the questions. The interview questions were formulated in an age-appropriate way. Both research instruments were tested during the pilot phase of the study and minor adjustments were made. The following section will discuss the pilot phase and the ways that the collected data will be analysed in order to answer this study's research questions.

4.4 Data collection and analysis methods

4.4.1 Pilot

A small-scale test of the research design was conducted in order to finalise the structure of the research instruments and to identify potential difficulties in carrying out the data collection process. The aims of the pilot phase were to identify potential difficulties in participants' understanding of the questionnaire and interview questions, to estimate the average time required for completing the questionnaire and for conducting the interview, and to check practical details regarding the distribution and collection of the questionnaires.

The pilot testing of the questionnaire and the interview guide was conducted in one state high school (7th High School of Athens). In order to achieve a sample which includes all different ages within the study's age group (14-17 years old), it was agreed (in collaboration with the head teacher of the school) that the questionnaire would be distributed to one classroom from each of the three high school year levels. The researcher visited the school in order to distribute the consent forms to all participants. After one week the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the students of each classroom during the school's teaching hours, in collaboration with the head teacher of the school. The completion of the questionnaire did not raise any issues and it was estimated that all questionnaires were completed within 15-20 minutes. In addition, there was a high response rate. Therefore, it was decided that there was no need for changes in the structure or content of the questionnaires.

Moreover, the pilot phase provided the opportunity to test the SPSS database which was created in order to collate the questionnaire data. Frequency distributions were calculated using SPSS software (Field, 2018; Holcomb & Cox, 2018) in order to identify the types of social media platforms that participants use, the frequency of using these platforms and the types of activities in which they engage. The descriptive analysis of the questionnaire data

was then used in order to identify the most active users of the pilot sample. In addition, during the pilot, several practical issues in relation to inviting participants to the interview phase were clarified. The process of inviting students to participate in the interviews was successful and three interviews were conducted during that phase.

During the interviews, it was observed that the order of questions could be adjusted to achieve a more coherent discussion. The initial design of the interview guide included the questions about future aspirations in the first part of the interview and the questions about social media practices in the second part. However, it was observed that students felt more comfortable discussing social media in general before responding to more personal questions about their own practices and future aspirations. Furthermore, additional probing questions were added to the interview guide because the duration of the interviews was shorter than expected (15-20 minutes).

4.4.2 Data collection

In this section, the process of data collection will be described. The data collection process lasted for four months in total, including the pilot phase. The schools which agreed to participate in this study were contacted by phone and a meeting was arranged between the researcher and the head teacher of each school. During the first meeting, the head teacher of each school was informed of the aims of the study and the details of the data collection process. Moreover, the consent forms for the participants were given to the head teacher who then distributed them to the students at his/her school. The students who did not wish to participate were instructed to return the signed consent forms to the head teacher, stating that they did not wish to participate.

The questionnaires were printed and distributed by the researcher to the students during a second visit to each school. The head teacher of each school told the researcher which students had returned negative consent forms and those students were not given questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed in the classroom and collected by the

researcher. The head teacher of each school was contacted by the researcher within four weeks following the completion of the questionnaire in order to provide the codes and the consent forms to enable invitation of the participants to the interview phase. All consent forms were received by the head teacher and a third school visit was arranged in order to conduct the interviews. All interviews were conducted and recorded within the school setting and during the schools' teaching hours. In each school a classroom was provided in which to conduct the interviews.

The following tables provide a summary of the collected data and of the demographic characteristics of the participants in the questionnaire and accordingly in the interviews:

Table 4.3: Summary of collected data in each district area

DISTRICT AREA	SCHOOL TYPE/NAME	QUESTIONNAIRES	SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS
A' of Athens	1. 7th High School of Athens (State School)	63	6
	2. 2nd Evening High School of Athens (State Evening School)	2	-
	3. Leontios High School (Private School)	65	11
B' of Athens	4. Kollegio Psychikou High School (Private School)	49	7
C' of Athens	5. 10th High School of Peristeri (State School)	59	10
D' of Athens	6. 2nd Evening High School of Ag. Dimitrios (State Evening School)	6	4
	7. Evangeliki High School (State School)	72	-
East Attica	8. 2nd High School of Gerakas (State School)	58	7
West Attica	9. 2nd High School of Elefsina (State School)	54	-
Piraeus	10. 1st EPAL High School of Piraeus (State Vocational School)	35	-
	TOTAL	463	45

Table 4.4: Summary of collected data and demographic information

		QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANTS		INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
DISTRICT AREA	A' of Athens	130		17
	B' of Athens	49		7
	C' of Athens	59		10
	D' of Athens	78		4
	East Attica	58		7
	West Attica	54		-
	Piraeus	35		-
TYPE OF SCHOOL	State	306		23
	Private	114		18
	Evening	8		4
	Vocational	35		-
GENDER	Boys	238	*(1 missing)*	14
	Girls	224		31
ETHNIKO TITA[8]	Greek (both parents Greek)	368	*(14 missing)*	39
	Other	81		6

4.4.3 Methods of analysis

To begin with, quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were entered in a data set in SPSS. The data set was checked for errors and simple frequency analyses were conducted to identify potential mistakes in entering the data. In order to organise and summarise the collected data, frequency distributions have been used (Field, 2018; Holcomb & Cox, 2018). A frequency distribution is used to illustrate how many times a score occurs (Field, 2018). Descriptive statistics were used to identify the types of social media platforms that participants use, the frequency of using these platforms and the types of activities in which they engage.

Apart from presenting a summary of the findings using frequency distributions, chi-square tests were used in order to identify potential associations between different variables of the questionnaire. The purpose of a chi-square test is to identify whether there is a relationship

[8] The use of the term *ethnikotita* has been explained in Chapter 2 ('Conducting research in the Greek context').

between two nominal (or ordinal) variables (Field, 2018; Miller et al., 2002). A chi-square test aims to identify whether there is a statistically significant difference in the frequency of a nominal or ordinal variable across different categories (Holcomb & Cox, 2018). This test has been selected among other options as the most suitable because the questionnaire of the present study involved the use of nominal and ordinal variables. Chi-square tests were used to identify potential statistical significance and relationships between the categorical variables of the questionnaire, such as gender/type of school/parental educational level/*ethnikotita* differences in relation to users–non-users/types of social media platforms/frequency of use/types of social media practices. Spearman's rank-order correlation tests (Field, 2018) were also run to determine the relationship between ordinal variables. More specifically, in the present thesis the Spearman's rank-order tests were used to determine the relationship between participants' level of agreement (Not True/A Bit True/Very True) about aspects of identity and future aspirations and the total number of social media platforms they use, as well as the frequency of their daily connections to social media.

Moreover, interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts imported into the NVivo software. A thematic analysis was conducted and transcripts were coded following a thematic coding approach (Gibbs, 2007; Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2014). Themes were identified by employing a six-phase practical approach as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by re-reading the transcripts in order to produce initial codes in NVivo. The codes emerged from the data in an iterative process (Newby, 2014). Codes were attached to units of the transcripts (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009). Secondly, a list of all the codes[9] which emerged during the coding process was created in order to group them into themes by looking into patterns, links, similarities and differences between the identified codes (Newby, 2014). The codes were grouped into themes which were data-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and

[9] A complete list of all codes and themes is presented in Appendix X.

were used to discuss findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study. Furthermore, during the last phase of the analysis, quantitative findings were discussed in relation to the findings from the qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis findings were used to inform and explain potential statistical significance identified between variables in the quantitative findings. Therefore, the data analysis follows a mixed-methods approach by combining both quantitative and qualitative findings to answer the study's research questions. Table 4.5 provides an overview of the methods of analysis and their relation to each of the research questions:

Table 4.5: Overview of data analysis methods

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	METHODS OF ANALYSIS	ANALYSIS PRODUCTS
RQ1: Which are the main online practices that young people (14-17 years old) engage with on social media platforms?	**Quantitative** (SPSS): - Frequencies, Descriptive statistics - Chi-square tests	**Quantitative**: Identification of: • Users/non-users of social media platforms • Types of social media platforms used • Frequency of daily/weekly use of social media platforms • Types of social media practices in which participants engage • Relationship between variables: - Gender - Type of school - Level of parental education - *Ethnikotita* - Users/non-users of social media - Frequency of weekly and daily use - Types of social media platforms - Types of social media practices
RQ2: How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their identities?	**Quantitative** (SPSS): - Descriptive analysis, Frequencies - Chi-square tests - Spearman's rho **Qualitative** (NVivo): - Thematic coding analysis	**Quantitative**: Relationship between variables: - Responses to section 3 of the questionnaire (aspects of identity) - Gender - Type of school - Level of parental education - *Ethnikotita* **Qualitative**: Themes in students' narratives about identity in relation to social media practices
RQ3: How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their educational and career aspirations?	**Quantitative** (SPSS): - Descriptive analysis, Frequencies - Chi-square tests - Spearman's rho **Qualitative** (NVivo): - Thematic coding analysis	**Quantitative**: Relationship between variables: - Responses to section 4 of the questionnaire (future aspirations) - Gender - Type of school - Level of parental education - *Ethnikotita* **Qualitative**: Themes in students' narratives about types of future aspirations and their relation to social media practices

RQ4: How do young people's social locations relate to their online practices and engagement with social media platforms?	**Quantitative** (SPSS): - Chi-Square tests **Qualitative** (NVivo): - Thematic coding analysis	**Quantitative**: Relationship between variables: - Gender - Type of school - Level of parental education - *Ethnikotita*	- Users/non-users of social media - Frequency of weekly and daily use - Types of social media platforms - Types of social media practices
		Qualitative: Comparative analysis of the themes identified in previous stages (identification of potential differences between students from different types of schools/levels of parental education/*ethnikotita*/gender)	

4.5 Ethical considerations

The present study raised several ethical concerns, in particular because it involves the participation of young people under the age of 18. All relevant ethical concerns have been raised in the ethics application that the researcher completed, and which was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Roehampton. The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference EDU 16/ 111 in the Department of Education and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 18.01.17.

The potential ethical issues for this study and the ways that they have been addressed are as follows:

Participants and consent: All participants and their parents were invited to agree to participate in the study by signing participation consent forms. Parental consent was obtained for all participants before conducting the research. In addition, consent from the students and also from the head teachers of all participating schools was obtained. Students

who were invited to participate in the interviews were given a second parental consent form explaining the interview procedure. (All consent forms are available in Appendix VII.)

Permissions for conducting research: As the data collection for this study was conducted in Athens, approval from the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) was requested and obtained. IEP is the Greek institution that gives permission for conducting research in schools. Head teachers of all participating schools were also informed in person by the researcher about the details of the research aims and the process of data collection. The head teachers signed participation consent forms as well.

Confidentiality and anonymity: The researcher is committed to protecting the confidentiality of all participants and their data at all times. Hard copies of the questionnaire data have been stored at the researcher's office and all electronic data have been stored on a password-protected personal laptop. Personal details of participants have been removed from the laptop. Hard copies of the filled-in questionnaires will be stored and locked in the researcher's office and retained securely for 10 years. Audio recordings of the interviews will only be kept on the password-protected laptop. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

Involvement of vulnerable population: All young participants and their parents were invited to agree to participate in the study by signing participation consent forms. No photographs, images or other visual content related to the participants were used and their personal data entered in the questionnaire will be protected according to all ethical guidelines as described above. Confidentiality of data will be ensured, and this was explained to all young participants in order to create an environment of trust. All research procedures were designed in accordance with the guidelines of the Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and the BERA's ethical guidelines for educational research (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Finally, in order to avoid any

uncomfortable situations during the interview process, several warm-up questions were used.

Right to withdraw: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research for any reason and at any time. Their right to withdraw was explained by the researcher in person during all school visits. It was also mentioned clearly in the consent letter that participants could withdraw at any point in the course of the study.

Social media research: According to the BPS Ethics Guidelines on Internet-mediated Research (British Psychological Society, 2017), several challenges arise in adhering to existing ethics principles when conducting Internet-mediated research. For the purposes of this study no data from the online profiles of the participants was requested and no online profiles were displayed on any devices.

Deception: Participants (and their parents) were fully informed about the research content and there was no use of deception in order to collect data.

4.6 Reflexive considerations

As a researcher doing social research, it is important to reflect on my own position and on the potential impact of my own background on the research process. As is the case with mixed methods research, the analysis and discussion of findings has emerged within the researcher's own interpretation. In order to undertake ethical research, it is important to acknowledge and be aware of the power relations which are inherent in the research process (Sultana, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to discuss the impact of my own background on my involvement in the research process.

My professional background has played an important role in designing this study and has also influenced the discussion of the study's findings. Before beginning this research project, I worked as a primary school teacher in Athens for four years. My experience as a teacher has equipped me with practical knowledge of the Greek educational context, which has helped me to be aware of practicality issues which could arise during the recruitment

and data collection processes. In addition, my previous role as a teacher has helped me to build trust with the school staff during the recruitment process, thus enabling my access to the field. Furthermore, my ethnic background, as a white female living in Athens for most of my life, has familiarised me with the field of research and the context of the Greek schools.

My educational background as a researcher who is doing a PhD abroad may have contributed to the creation of a power relationship with the students. During the interviews I was conscious of these power dynamics and tried to use simple and clear language. I believe that my position as a PhD student abroad may have created different power relations across different school contexts during the school visits. To students from less affluent social class backgrounds I may have appeared privileged because of my level of education and my affiliation with a UK institution.

During the school visits that I conducted throughout the data collection process, I was aware of my social class background and how it is embodied and displayed by my appearance. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue, the appearance of the interviewer may play a crucial role in the relationships shaped in the field. Therefore, I consciously tried to avoid wearing accessories such as jewellery, and I chose neutral styles of clothing to avoid formality.

During the interviews, I was conscious of the power dynamics stemming from my age (being an adult) in relation to the participants, which may have affected the amount of information they wanted to share with me about their social media practices. However, I felt that as I was only in my late twenties, the participants felt relatively comfortable and familiar in discussing their use of social media, because the age gap with the interviewer was not enormous. During the interviews, I also tried to maintain an ‘outsider’ position by not making any approving/disapproving comments or expressing personal views, and by adopting a non-judgemental attitude. In addition, I tried to build rapport by starting the

interview with more generic questions that participants felt comfortable in answering, and by speaking in a friendly tone, using simple language.

Being a female researcher may have contributed to the fact that there were more girls than boys who agreed to participate in the interview phase. Nevertheless, during the interviews I felt that both boys and girls felt at ease in expressing their views. Regarding the 'insider/outsider' position of the researcher, I was not affiliated with any of the schools which participated in the study and was thus seen as an 'outsider' through being an external researcher who had invited their school to participate in my research project. On the other hand, because of having grown up, attended high school and worked as a teacher in Athens, I could also be seen partly as an 'insider'. Being closely positioned to the participants in some dimensions and not in others is common for researchers, because positionality is multidimensional (Rowe, 2014). Various aspects of my identity would have come to the fore in different interactions with the participants of this study, hence I am aware of my own positioning and I do not claim to be objective.

The aims of this study are to explore young people's social media practices and the ways that these practices relate to the development of identities and future aspirations. Thus, the epistemology of the present study takes into account both social structures and personal agency. This position underpinned not only the design of this study but also the analysis and discussion of findings. Young people's practices cannot be detached from the social context within which they are developed.

4.7 Methods in use and limitations

The research design was developed after taking into consideration the particularities of the context in which this study is conducted. Minor changes and adjustments have been made during the data collection process in order to overcome some practical issues which the researcher faced.

Firstly, the questionnaire was initially designed to identify potential participants in a follow-up interview. For this purpose, there was a section in the questionnaire requesting participants' contact information as this would enable the researcher to invite participants from each school to the interview phase. However, the guidelines provided by the Greek Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) (Institute of Educational Policy, 2019) demanded that none of the participants' contact information is requested on the questionnaire. Thus, the contact information section was removed from the questionnaire and a numeric code was added to enable the researcher to issue invitations to the interviews by tracking the participants through their schools in collaboration with the head teacher. Each numeric code assigned to each student was in accordance with the school's student ID number. The researcher sent the head teacher of each school by email the questionnaire code numbers of the participants that she wished to invite for the interview phase. The head teachers could then identify the names of the students by using the student ID numbers. Each student who was invited to the interview phase was given a second parental consent form by the head teacher of his/her school. All the students who participated in the interview phase returned the completed consent forms to the researcher before the interviews were conducted.

Secondly, the initial sampling strategy aimed to achieve the participation of two evening high schools to ensure that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds participated in the study. However, after contacting the evening high schools it was observed that the number of students who attended these schools and were within the study's target age group was relatively low. Thus, in order to ensure that a larger number of students from similar socio-economic backgrounds were included in the sample, a vocational high school was added to the participating schools. As mentioned earlier, evening high schools operate during the afternoon and are for working students, whereas vocational high schools attract mostly students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (CEDEFOP, 2014). Therefore, since the sample from the evening high schools was markedly low, a vocational high

school was added to the sample of participating schools. Nevertheless, during the interview phase arose another difficulty in including participants from evening schools, because for several of them their school attendance was interrupted by their working hours. A total number of four students finally participated in the interviews.

To conclude, the semi-structured interview guide was initially designed to include a demonstration of the participants' online profiles through their mobile devices in case they should wish to provide specific examples of their online practices. However, it was understood from the pilot phase that this was not feasible due to the lack of wireless internet connection in schools. The demonstration of examples through the participants' devices could have contributed to the development of richer discussions concerning online social media practices.

Despite these limitations, it is believed that the selected research methods provide insightful findings which address the study's research questions.

CHAPTER 5: Young people's social media practices in Greece

In this chapter, the data collected using the questionnaire will be presented and discussed. The analysis of the quantitative data aims to provide an answer to the first research question of this study (RQ1: Which are the main online practices that young people engage with on social media platforms?) by discussing young people's use of social media platforms in Athens (Greece).

Firstly, a summary of the descriptive statistics of the general sample population will be presented along with the associations identified between different variables. The identified associations between specific variables such as gender, *ethnikotita*, type of school and level of parental education, and participants' social media practices (types of social media platforms participants use/daily–weekly engagement in social media/reasons for using social media) will be presented. In the final section of this chapter, the key findings of the quantitative analysis will be highlighted, and their implications will be discussed.

The identified associations between participants' social locations (gender/*ethnikotita*/type of school/level of parental education) and their social media practices will be investigated in more depth in the following chapters by combining the quantitative analysis with the qualitative findings.

5.1 Variables for understanding social location

Before presenting the questionnaire findings, it is important to provide some information about the particularities of the analysis in relation to the following variables (which have been used to describe participants' social locations): *ethnikotita*, type of school and parental educational level.

5.1.1 'Ethnikotita'

In order to identify whether there are associations between young people's *ethnikotita* and their social media practices, chi-square tests have been used. Participants were asked to

self-complete the ethnicity of their mother and father in the last section of the questionnaire. A variety of different responses were reported by the participants[10]. However, in order to conduct a chi-square test it is necessary to have two (or more) variables which do not include a large number of categories (Miller et al., 2002). Hence, after inserting the relevant data into SPSS software, participants were grouped in three categories. One category included those who reported having 'both parents Greek', the second category included those who reported having 'one parent Greek' and the third category included those having 'neither parent Greek'.

5.1.2 Type of school

The type of school which participants attend has been used, as another variable about students' social class background, in order to investigate whether the type of school may be associated with particular types of social media practices and the level of participants' engagement with social media platforms. In order to identify the potential associations between the type of school and social media practices, several chi-square tests have been conducted.

The distribution of participants was not equal among the different types of schools (306 participants from state high schools, 114 from private high schools, 8 from state evening high schools, and 35 from state vocational high schools). As mentioned in Chapter 4 ('Methodology'), evening high schools operate during the afternoon and are established for working students, whereas vocational high schools also attract mostly students who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds (CEDEFOP, 2014). Therefore, since the number of participants from the evening high schools was considerably low (n=8), participants from a vocational high school were recruited[11]. As a result, it was decided that participants from evening high schools would be grouped in the same category as participants from

[10] In Section 2.3.2, the use of term *ethnikotita* has been explained as well as how participants used nationality categories (Greek/Albanian etc.) to define parental ethnicity.
[11] Further explanation on the recruitment process was provided in Section 4.7.

vocational schools. This decision was made in order to reduce the number of categories within the 'Type of school' variable, because, as mentioned, in order to conduct a chi-square test it is required to have two (or more) variables which do not include a large number of categories (Miller et al., 2002). Hence, for the purposes of the quantitative data analysis, participants from the evening high schools were included in the same group variable as those attending the vocational high school, thus ensuring the reliability of the statistical analysis. The 'Type of School' variable thus included three categories (State High School, Private High School, State Evening/Vocational High School).

The type of school which students attend serves as an indicator of their socio-economic background, assuming that students who attend private high schools come from a more affluent background, by contrast with students from vocational and evening high schools who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The level of parental education will serve as another indicator of students' social class background.

5.1.3 Parental educational level

A variable which involves three categories has been created based on the collected data in order to explore the association of parental educational level and young people's engagement with social media. The questionnaire contained a section in which participants were asked to select the educational level of each of their parents. The options provided in the questionnaire were: MA/PhD Degree, BA Degree, High School Degree, Secondary School Degree, Primary School Degree. Based on participants' answers about each of their parents, a variable called 'parental educational level' was created on the SPSS database, with the following values: 'Highly Educated' (this category included participants having at least one parent who holds an HE Degree (MA/PhD/BA)), 'Medium Educated' (this category included participants who have at least one parent having a High/Secondary School Degree), and 'Lower Educated' (this category included participants both of whose

parents hold a Primary School Degree). There were 18 participants who responded that they 'do not know' their parents' level of education, who were not included in the analysis.

5.2 Demographic information

As described in Chapter 4 ('Methodology'), the questionnaire was completed by 463 students in total, attending high schools in Athens, and aged between 14-17 years old. The sample of participants included students from all seven district areas of Athens, and from four types of high schools (306 participants from State High Schools, 114 from Private High Schools, eight from State Evening High Schools, and 35 from State Vocational High Schools).

The distribution of participants from each type of school follows a similar pattern to the distribution of the general student population among the different types of high schools in Athens. As presented in data provided by the Greek Ministry of Education, the total number of state high schools in all district areas of urban and suburban Athens is 297 (attracting the majority of the student population), whereas private high schools number 58, state vocational high schools number 72 and state evening high schools number 35. These numbers were produced by counting the schools on the list of all operating schools provided online by the official records of the Greek Ministry of Education (Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Attica, 2016).

The following table provides an overview of the participants' demographic information:

Table 5.1: Demographic information of questionnaire participants

							MISSING	
GENDER	**Boys** 238	**Girls** 223					2	**TOTAL N=463**
AGE	**14 Years old** 4	**15 Years Old** 154	**16 Years Old** 142	**17 Years Old** 163			-	
PARENTAL *ETHNIKOTITA*	**Both Parents Greek** 366	**One Parent Greek** 26	**Other (Neither Parent Greek)** 57				14	
PARENTAL EDUCATION	**Both parents hold an HE Degree** (PhD/MA/BA) 209	**One parent holds an HE Degree** (PhD/MA/BA) 108	**Both parents hold a High/Secondary School Degree** 96	**One parent holds a High/Secondary School Degree** 16	**Both parents hold a Primary School Degree** 4	**I don't know** 18	12	

A range of various *ethnikotites* was reported by participants neither of whose parents was Greek. These responses were grouped as 'other' in order to identify the percentage of students who come from a non-Greek background. The details of the different *ethnikotites* reported by the participants are presented in Appendix XI. The most common non-Greek *ethnikotita* is Albanian (9.3% for father's *ethnikotita*, 10.6% for mother's *ethnikotita*).

The above demographic information follows a similar pattern to the statistical demographic information on the general population of Athens as reported in the latest census by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2014).

The questionnaire also provided information about parental educational levels, as shown in the following table:

Table 5.2: Higher level of parental education

HIGHER LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	n (%)
Both parents hold an HE Degree (BA/MA/PhD)	209 (46.3%)
One parent holds an HE Degree (BA/MA/PhD)	108 (23.9%)
Both parents hold a High/Secondary School Degree	96 (21.3%)
One parent holds a High/Secondary School Degree	16 (3.5%)
Both parents hold a Primary School Degree	4 (0.9%)
I don't know	18 (4%)
Missing	12 (2.6%)
Total	463 (100%)

5.3 Types of online social media platforms

5.3.1 Users and non-users of social media

The first section of the questionnaire aimed to identify the level of engagement with online social media platforms by the participants. Similarly to previous findings about young people's use of social media in the EU and US contexts, it is observed that the vast majority of the participants are users of social media platforms (n=448, 96.8%), whereas non-users constitute just 3.2% (n=15) of the sample.

The majority of the non-users were Greek (n=13) and most of them were attending state high schools (n=9), while two were attending private high schools, two an evening high school and two a vocational high school. The main reason selected by ten of the fifteen non-users as justification for not using any social media platform was lack of interest in social media. Four of the non-users reported that, although in the past they had used some social media accounts, they stopped using them because they did not enjoy the activity. Interestingly, all four participants who reported not enjoying their use of social media platforms were those attending evening and vocational high schools. Among the non-users, only one participant stated that he did not use any online platforms because he did not

know what social media were. Moreover, one participant explained that he did not use social media because he did not own any of the devices needed to connect to social media platforms and to create an account.

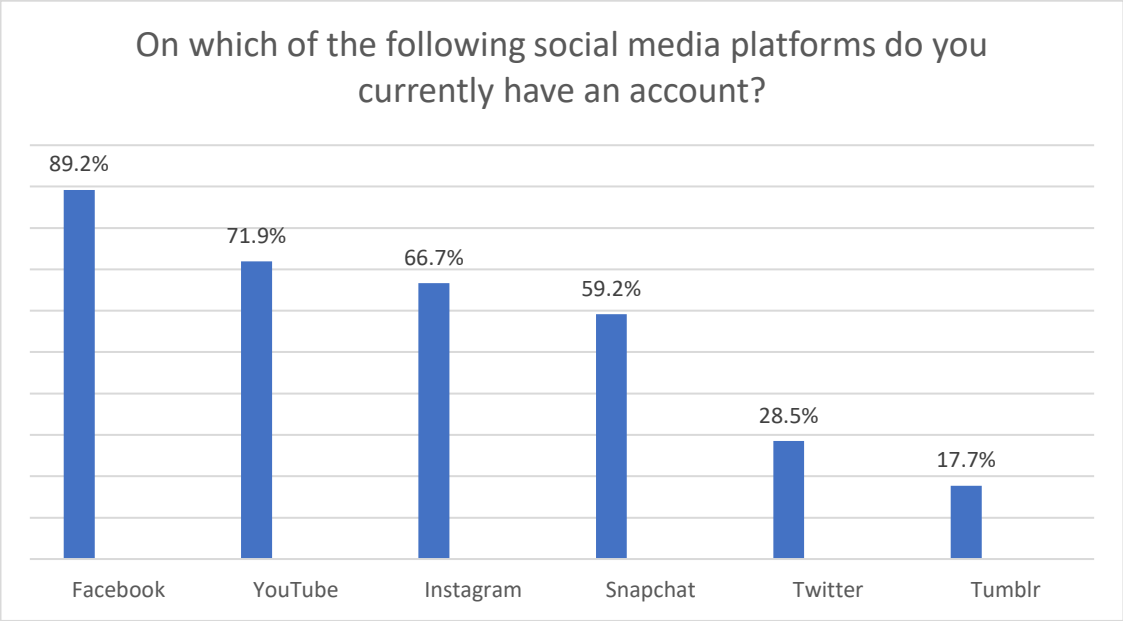
In the case of the non-users of social media platforms, there was a statistically significant association with gender (X^2 (1, N = 461) = 7.623, p =.006). Despite the fact that among those who reported using social media, there was an almost equal gender distribution (50.4%, n=225 were boys and 49.6%, n=221 were girls), non-users consisted mostly of boys (n=13, 86.7%) and only 2 (13.3%) were girls out of the total of 15 non-users.

5.3.2 Popular social media platforms

The next section of the questionnaire included questions about the types of social media platforms in which students have created accounts and the frequency of weekly connections to each of these social media platforms.

As shown in Figure 5.1, the majority of the participants reported having an account on Facebook (n=413, 89.2%), followed by YouTube (n=333, 71.9%), Instagram (n=309, 66.7%) and Snapchat (n=274, 59.2%). Twitter (n=132, 28.5%) was selected by a smaller number of participants in comparison to the aforementioned platforms, whereas Tumblr was the least popular (n=82, 17.7%).

Figure 5.1: Frequency distribution of participants' social media accounts



Social media platforms which were self-completed by some participants in the 'Other' section were: We Heart It (n=19, 4.1%), Pinterest (n=13, 2.8%), Ask.fm (n=12, 2.6%) and Wattpad (n=10, 2.2%). A very limited number of participants referred to other social media platforms such as Musical.ly, Vine and Flickr.

5.3.3 Participants' social locations and types of social media platforms: Identified associations

The chi-square analysis findings indicated several associations between gender and the use of particular social media platforms. Significant differences between boys and girls have been identified regarding the use of Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Tumblr (Table 5.3). As shown in Table 5.3, participants who reported not using Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr were more likely to be boys, whereas the YouTube platform was reported more often by boys and less by girls. These findings support arguments about girls engaging more in visually-oriented platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr (Swist et al., 2015).

Table 5.3: Frequency distribution of gender and users/non-users of social media platforms

	Users		**Non-Users**	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Facebook	52.6%	47.4%	44%	56%
Instagram	44.6%	55.4%	65.6%	34.4%
Twitter	44.7%	55.3%	54.4%	45.6%
Snapchat	42.3%	57.7%	65.1%	34.9%
YouTube	55.9%	44.1%	40.6%	59.4%
Tumblr	13.4%	86.6%	59.9%	40.1%

The following table presents the identified associations between the socio-economic variables and the use of different social media platforms.

Table 5.4[12]: Chi-Square test results: Associations between users of social media platforms and gender/ethnikotita/type of school/level of parental education

	Users/Non-Users of SM Platforms	**Facebook User**	**Instagram User**	**Twitter User**	**Snapchat User**	**YouTube User**	**Tumblr User**
GENDER	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 7.623, ***p* =.006**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 1.306, *p* =.253	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 18.039, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 3.557, *p* =.059	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 23.212, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 8.589, ***p* =.003**	X^2 (1, N = 461) = 58.318, ***p* =.000**
ETHNIKOTITA	*[13]	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 1.926, *p* =.382[14]	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 5.290, *p* =.071	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 11.572, ***p* =.003**	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = .719, *p* =.698	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = .666, *p* =.717	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 2.731, *p* =.255[15]
TYPE OF SCHOOL	*	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = .143, *p* =.931[16]	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = .462, *p* =.794	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 4.391, *p* =.111	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 4.423, *p* =.110	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 6.283, ***p* =.043**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 5.684, *p* =.058
LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	*	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 1.960, *p* =.375[17]	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 1.618, *p* =.445	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 5.159, *p* =.076	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 4.729, *p* =.094	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = .544, *p* =.762	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 5.173, *p* =.075[18]

[12]The cells of the table have been colour-coded. Grey coloured cells indicate significant associations.
[13] The symbol (*) is used in order to indicate that the Chi-square test results cannot be reported because although there was an estimated p value greater than .05, the contingency tables had more than 20% of expected frequencies less than 5 and therefore the results cannot be considered reliable (Field, 2018).
[14] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.78.
[15] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.69.
[16] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.64.
[17] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.16.
[18] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.53.

Although gender is associated with the use of several platforms as discussed above, there is also a significant association between *ethnikotita* and the use of Twitter (Chi-square: X^2 (2, N = 449) = 11.572, p =.003). More specifically, among the participants who reported using Twitter, 71.7% had both parents Greek, 9.4% had one Greek parent and 18.9% had parents from other ethnicities. Participants who came from a non-Greek background were likely to report using Twitter. In addition, a significant but not strong association has been identified between the use of YouTube and the type of school which students attend, as students who attend state schools were more likely to have an account on YouTube.

5.4 Level of engagement with social media platforms

5.4.1 Frequency of weekly and daily connections

The collected data regarding the frequency of weekly connections to social media platforms indicated that 67.6% (n=313) of the participants reported that they connect to Facebook every day, followed by 58.1% (n=269) for YouTube, 43.6% (n=202) for Instagram and 32.3% (n=149) for Snapchat. The weekly use of Twitter and Tumblr was much lower compared to the above, as only 4.1% (n=19) of the respondents reported that they connect daily to each one of these two platforms.

Regarding the questionnaire's findings about the weekly engagement of young people with each of the aforementioned social media platforms, the following table presents the means of the weekly use of each platform. As shown in the following table, participants reported using Facebook more frequently than the other social media platforms.

Table 5.5: Means of weekly use of social media platforms (1= Everyday, 2= 5-6 days per week, 3= 3-4 days per week, 4= 1-2 days per week, 5= Almost Never/Never)

Types of Social Media Platforms	**Weekly Use (Mean)**
Facebook	1.87
YouTube	2.29
Instagram	2.87
Snapchat	3.57
Twitter	4.68
Tumblr	4.68

Regarding the frequency of daily connections to one or more of the social media platforms that they use, 42.5% (n=197) of the participants reported that they were almost constantly connected and 42.8% (n=198) reported that they connected several times during the day, whereas only 5.2% (n=24) reported connecting once a day and 5.2% (n=24) reported not being connected on a daily basis. Finally, 4.3% (n=20) reported that they were almost never or never connected to social media platforms. The mean of daily connections was estimated at 1.86 (1=Almost constantly connected, 2=Connected several times during the day, 3=Connected once a day, 4=Not being connected on a daily basis, 5=Almost never/never connected).

5.4.2 Participants' social locations and social media engagement: Identified associations

Similarly to the findings about gender associations with the types of social media platforms, significant gender differences were identified regarding weekly engagement and daily connections. Significant associations were also identified between gender and the level of weekly engagement to Instagram (Chi-square: X^2 (4, N = 461) = 27.587, p =.000), Snapchat (Chi-square: X^2 (5, N = 461) = 32.309, p =.000[19]) and Tumblr (Chi-square: X^2 (4, N = 461) = 38.521, p =.000[20]). Girls were more likely to use these platforms more frequently on a weekly basis (as shown in Table 5.6). However, in relation to the weekly use of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter there was no significant difference between boys and girls.

[19] 2 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.
[20] 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.84.

Table 5.6: Frequency distribution of boys'/girls' weekly use of social media platforms

	EVERYDAY		5-6 DAYS PER WEEK		3-4 DAYS PER WEEK		1-2 DAYS PER WEEK		ALMOST NEVER/NEVER	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Face book	51.3%	48.7%	50%	50%	65.4%	34.6%	52.9%	47.1%	48.4%	51.6%
Insta gram	38.6%	61.4%	51.4%	48.6%	52.4%	47.6%	59.3%	40.7%	65.3%	40.7%
Twitt er	36.8%	63.2%	44.4%	55.6%	42.9%	57.1%	53.3%	46.7%	52.7%	47.3%
Snap chat	36.2%	63.8%	38.5%	61.5%	46.7%	53.3%	44%	56%	64.6%	35.4%
YouT ube	56.5%	43.5%	50%	50%	56.7%	43.3%	38.1%	61.9%	41.3%	58.7%
Tum blr	15.8%	84.2%	10%	90%	0%	100%	26.1%	73.9%	57.1%	42.9%

The following table supports the above findings as it presents the means of the weekly use of each social media platform by boys and girls respectively. As illustrated in Table 5.7, the weekly use of Instagram and Snapchat was greater by girls whereas the weekly use of all other platforms was similar between boys and girls.

Table 5.7: Means of weekly use of social media platforms by boys/girls (1= Everyday, 2= 5-6 days per week, 3= 3-4 days per week, 4= 1-2 days per week, 5= Almost Never/Never)

Types of Social Media Platforms	**Weekly Use (Mean)**	
	Boys	***Girls***
Facebook	1.87	1.88
YouTube	2.07	2.52
Instagram	3.30	2.42
Snapchat	4.01	3.11
Twitter	4.75	4.62
Tumblr	4.91	4.43

In relation to the daily connections, a statistically significant, but not strong, association (Chi-square: X^2 (4, N = 461) = 9.582, p =.048) has been identified between gender and the frequency of daily connections. The difference is observed in relation to those who reported connecting online rarely on social media platforms, who were more likely to be boys.

As indicated in the table below, the findings indicate that gender is strongly associated with the weekly use of Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr, supporting previous research findings from the US and Australia where girls are more frequent social media users than boys and also engage more in visual-based social media platforms (Lenhart, 2015; Swist et al., 2015).

Table 5.8[21]: Chi-square test results - Associations between social media platforms weekly use and gender/ethnikotita/type of school/parental educational level

	Facebook Weekly Use	**Instagram Weekly Use**	**Twitter Weekly Use**	**Snapchat Weekly Use**	**YouTube Weekly Use**	**Tumblr Weekly Use**	**Daily Connection to SM Platforms**
GENDER	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) = 2.302, *p* =.680	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) = 27.587, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) = 2.492, *p* =.646[22]	X^2 (5, *N* = 461) = 32.309, ***p* =.000[23]**	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) = 9.111, *p* =.058	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) = 38.521, ***p* =.000[24]**	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) = 9.582, ***p* =.048**
ETHNIKOTITA	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TYPE OF SCHOOL	*	X^2 (8, *N* = 463) = 8.509, *p* =.385[25]	*	*	X^2 (8, *N* = 463) = 15.363, *p* =.052[26]	*	**[27]
LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

5.5 Types of devices

The most common device which participants reported using in order to connect to social media were smartphones (92.4%, n=427). Almost half of them reported using a laptop (44.2%, n=204), whereas 35.3% (n=163) used a PC and 21.2% (n=98) a tablet. Half of the participants (50.5%, n=232) reported using two types of the above devices to connect to social media platforms, 27.2% (n=125) use just one type of device, 15.5% (n=71) use three

[21] The cells of the table have been colour-coded. Grey coloured cells indicate significant associations.
[22] 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.35.
[23] 2 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .48.
[24] 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.84.
[25] 3 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.04.
[26] 3 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.95.
[27] The symbol (**) is used in order to indicate that the Chi-square test results cannot be reported because although there was an estimated p value less than .05, the contingency tables had more than 20% of expected frequencies with less than 5 counts and therefore the results cannot be considered reliable (Field, 2018).

types of devices and 4.6% (n=21) reported using all four types of devices, whereas 2.2% (n=10) reported not using any device.

5.5.1 Participants' social locations and types of devices: Identified associations

The use of different types of devices to connect to social media platforms also revealed some significant gender differences. In relation to the use of a PC. 65.4% of those who reported using this device were boys and 34.6% were girls (Chi-square: X^2 (1, N = 460) = 19.373, p =.000). Furthermore, smartphone users consisted of 48.9% boys and 51.1% girls, but a significant difference was identified among those who reported not using a smartphone to connect, among whom 82.9% were boys and 17.1% girls (Chi-square: X^2 (1, N = 460) = 14.893, p =.000). Regarding the total number of devices that they use, a statistically significant association was identified in relation to gender. Boys were more likely to belong to the group who reported using all four types of devices; but also, those who reported using no device were more likely to be boys (Chi-square: X^2 (4, N = 457) = 13.866, p =.00828).

In addition, the devices that young people use to connect to social media revealed some associations with the type of school. In fact, it was observed that the use of a PC was more likely for students from vocational/evening high schools (Chi-square: X^2 (2, N = 462) = 14.433, p =.001). This association might seem unexpected, since the cost of owning a PC is much higher than that of a smartphone; therefore, students who attend private schools would have been expected to report using a PC. A possible explanation for this association between use of a PC and students who attend evening and vocational high schools could be that these students use computers provided at their schools or at internet cafés, since they may have no access at home or through portable devices.

[28] 1 cell (10.0%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.88.

Table 5.9[29]: Chi-square test results - Associations between types of devices used and gender/ethnikotita/type of school/level of parental education

	PC	**Laptop**	**Smartphone**	**Tablet**	**No Device**	**Number of total devices**
GENDER	X^2 (1, *N* = 460) = 19.373, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (1, *N* = 460) = 1.304, *p* =.254	X^2 (1, *N* = 460) = 14.893, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (1, *N* = 460) = .204, *p* =.651	X^2 (1, *N* = 460) = 4.992, ***p* =.025**	X^2 (4, *N* = 457) = 13.866, ***p* =.008**[30]
ETHNIKOTITA	X^2 (2, *N* = 448) = 3.562, *p* =.168	X^2 (2, *N* = 448) = 5.828, *p* =.054	*	X^2 (2, *N* = 448) = .712, *p* =.701	*	*
TYPE OF SCHOOL	X^2 (2, *N* = 462) = 14.433, ***p* =.001**	X^2 (2, *N* = 462) = 5.586, *p* =.061	X^2 (2, *N* = 462) = 2.760, *p* =.252[31]	X^2 (2, *N* = 462) = 1.439, *p* =.487	*	X^2 (8, *N* = 459) = 12.984, *p* =.112[32]
LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	X^2 (2, *N* = 435) = 2.018, *p* =.365	X^2 (2, *N* = 435) = .014, *p* =.993	X^2 (2, *N* = 435) = 7.657, ***p* =.022**[33]	X^2 (2, *N* = 435) = 3.299, *p* =.192[34]	**[35]	*

Moreover, the level of parental education was associated with the use of smartphone devices as it was identified that the students who reported not using a smartphone were more likely to have parents belonging to the lower educated group.

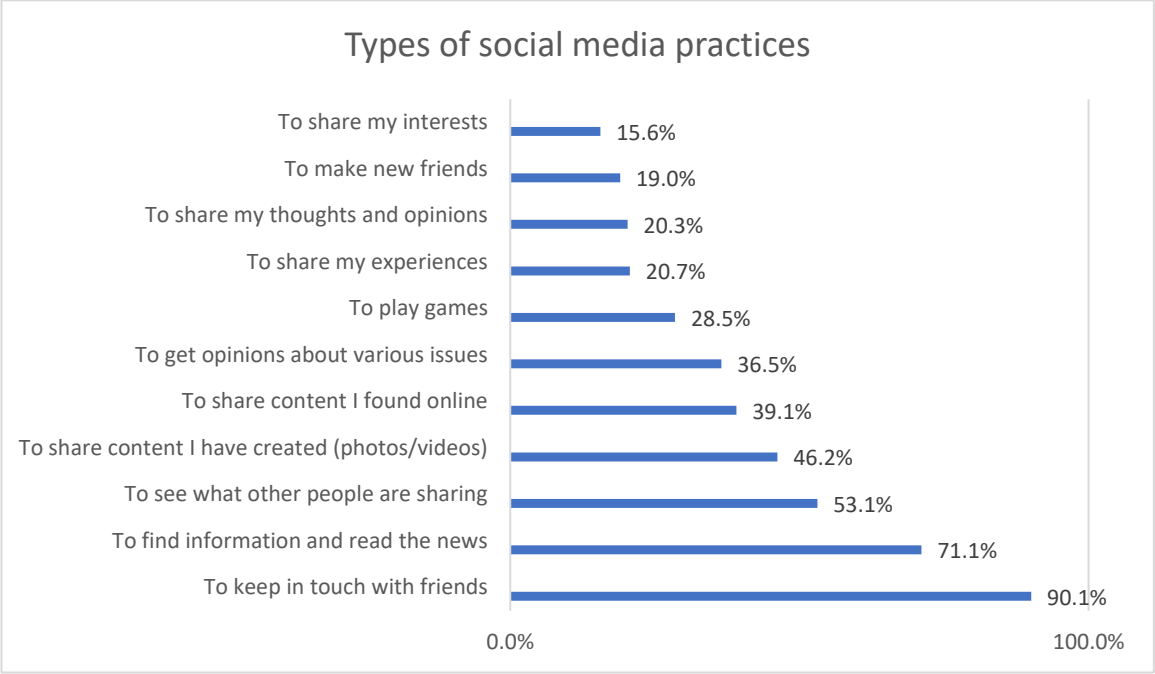
5.6 Types of online social media practices

The second section of the questionnaire aimed to identify the types of practices in which participants engage on social media platforms. The respondents could choose as many of the following types of social media practices as they wanted. As shown in Figure 5.2, almost all respondents (90.1%, n=417) reported using social media to keep in touch with friends and a large number of participants (71.1%, n=329) reported that they use their social media accounts to find information and read the news. Furthermore, 53.1% (n=246) of the participants reported using their social media accounts to see what other people were

[29] The cells of the table have been colour-coded. Grey coloured cells indicate significant associations.
[30] 1 cell (10.0%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.88.
[31] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.26.
[32] 3 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .92.
[33] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.38.
[34] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.23.
[35] The symbol (**) is used in order to indicate that the Chi-square test results cannot be reported because although there was an estimated p value less than .05, the contingency tables had more than 20% of expected frequencies less than 5 and therefore the results cannot be considered reliable (Field, 2018).

sharing. Figure 5.2 provides an overview of the frequency distribution percentages of all types of social media practices:

Figure 5.2: Frequency distribution of participants' types of social media practices



In addition, in this section of the questionnaire the participants were given the option to complete information about any other types of online practices in which they engage, and which may not have been included in the questionnaire. Several students reported that they use social media platforms in order to pass their free time or for entertainment. Others reported interest-related practices such as listening to music, watching videos about their interests, reading articles, and getting inspiration about photography and crafts. In the following table, all additional information about social media practices is included, as these practices were named variously by each of the respondents and were then grouped in themes by the researcher, as presented below.

Table 5.10: Self-reported types of social media practices

THEMES	TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES (SELF-REPORTED BY THE PARTICIPANTS)			
ENTERTAINMENT	Entertainment	Entertainment	For fun	
LEISURE	To pass my free time	To spend my free time when I am bored	To pass my time when I have nothing else to do	To fill my free time
INTEREST RELATED	To listen to music	To listen to music		
	To watch videos and movies	To watch videos	To watch videos related to my interests	To communicate with people who may have similar interests to mine
SOCIALISATION	Because in our generation the only way to socialise is social media	To make new friends in other countries who are their real selves	I use them because I don't have time to go out	
EASE OF COMMUNICATION	To communicate with friends inexpensively	Communication with family members abroad	To exchange pictures with my friends	
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	To create relationships, to find emotional support for negative feelings			
INSPIRATION	To see the quotes from famous authors that my friends are posting and that inspire me	To get inspiration about various things (photography, crafts)		
DAILY HABIT	It is an everyday habit	To relax everyday		
ADVERTISING	To see advertisements			

The vast majority of students (88.1%, n=408) reported that they use social media in order to follow accounts with news content, whereas 57.9% (n=268) use social media in order to follow accounts with educational or scientific content. However, slightly less than half of the participants (47.5%, n=220) use social media platforms to follow University or College accounts.

Table 5.11: Frequency distribution of educational/informational uses of social media platforms

EDUCATIONAL/INFORMATIONAL USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	**% (n)**
Connections to news accounts	88.1% (n=408)
Connections to social media accounts with educational/scientific content	57.9% (n=268)
Connections to University/College accounts	47.5% (n=220)

5.6.1 Participants' social locations and types of social media practices: Identified associations

As illustrated in Table 5.12, several associations have been identified between different types of social media practices and gender, type of school and level of parental education. The types of social media practices were not associated with *ethnikotita*, with the exception of 'sharing content (photos/videos/songs etc.) that I have found online', since participants whose parents are not Greek were more likely to engage in this social media practice (Chi-square: X^2 (2, N = 449) = 9.183, p =.010).

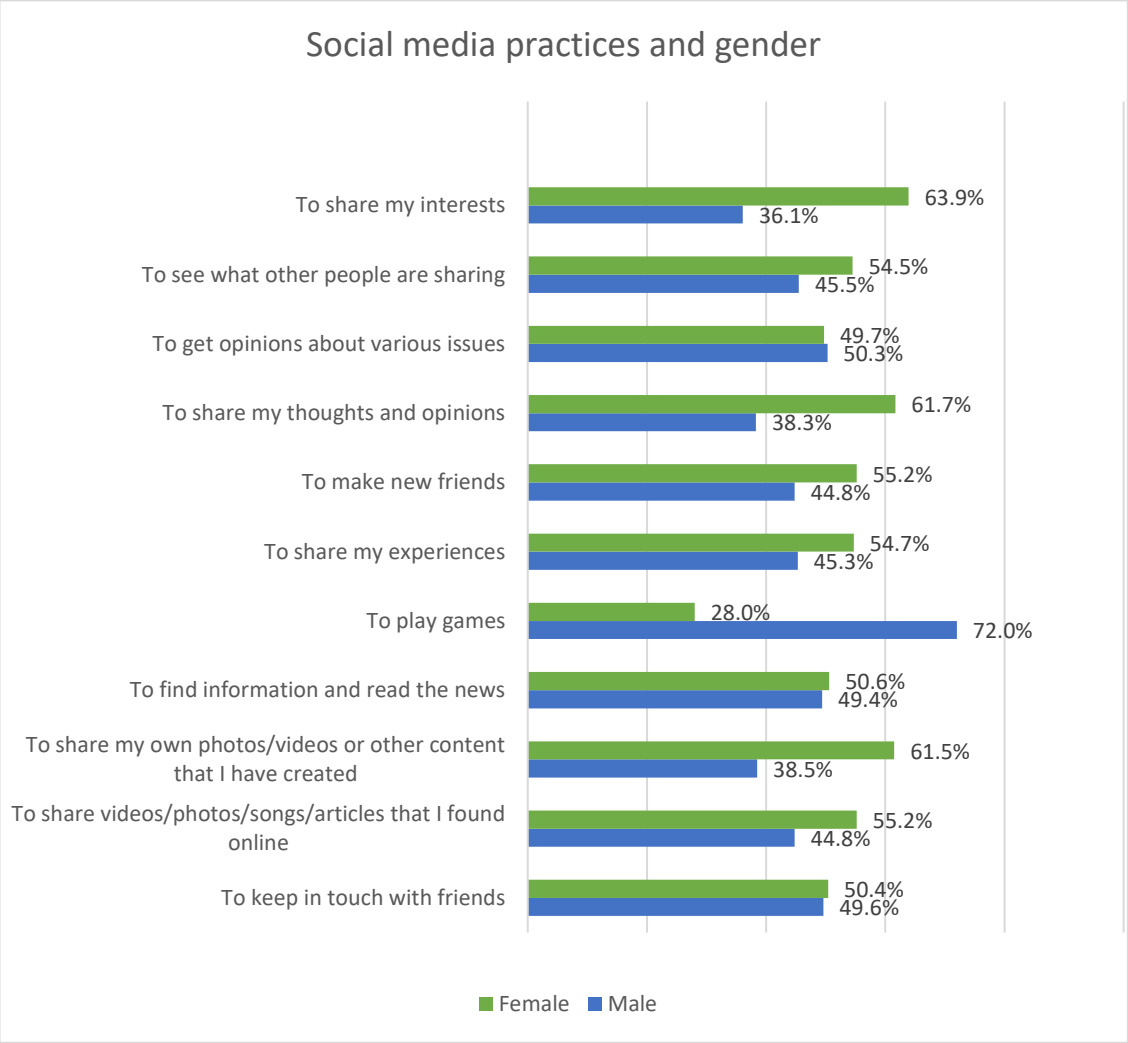
Table 5.12[36]: Chi-square test results - Associations between types of social media practices and gender/ethnikotita/type of school/level of parental education

	To keep in touch with friends	**To share videos/photos/songs/ articles that I have found online**	**To share my own photos/videos or other content that I have created**	**To find information and read the news**	**To play games**	**To share my experiences**	**To make new friends**	**To share my thoughts and opinions**	**To get opinions about various issues**	**To see what other people are sharing**	**To share my interests**
GENDER	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 6.584, ***p* =.010**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 5.641, ***p* =.018**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 27.329, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 2.277, *p* =.131	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 30.649, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 1.940, *p* =.164	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 1.985, *p* =.159	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 8.400, ***p* =.004**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = .189, *p* =.664	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) =7.855, ***p* =.005**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) =8.225, ***p* =.004**
ETHNIKOTITA	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 2.944, *p* =.229[37]	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 9.183, ***p* =.010**	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 3.260, *p* =.196	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = .612, *p* =.736	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 1.898, *p* =.387	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 3.693, *p* =.158	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = .569, *p* =.752[38]	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = .837, *p* =.658	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 1.063, *p* =.588	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = .761, *p* =.684	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 3.343, *p* =.188[39]
TYPE OF SCHOOL	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 1.261, *p* =.532[40]	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =7.763, ***p* =.021**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 2.227, *p* =.328	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =7.622, ***p* =.022**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =11.705, ***p* =.003**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 1.507, *p* =.471	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = .045, *p* =.978	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =7.352, ***p* =.025**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = 5.669, *p* =.059	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =8.842, ***p* =.012**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) = .684, *p* =.710
LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 1.800, *p* =.407[41]	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 3.857, *p* =.145	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 3.363, *p* =.186	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) =13.705, ***p* = .001**	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) =6.285, ***p* = .043**	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 1.301, *p* =.522[42]	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = .623, *p* =.732[43]	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = .993, *p* =.609[44]	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 4.817, *p* =.090	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) = 4.014, *p* =.134	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) =7.501, ***p* = .024**[45]

[36] The cells of the table have been colour-coded. Grey coloured cells indicate significant associations.
[37] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.55.
[38] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.98.
[39] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.00.
[40] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.27.
[41] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.93.
[42] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.08.
[43] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.81.
[44] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.99.
[45] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.12

Girls reported engaging in a broader variety of social media practices than boys. Specifically, it has been identified that more girls reported using their social media accounts to share photos/videos/song/articles that they have found online but also to share their own content (photos/videos etc.), to see what other people are sharing, to share their thoughts and opinions, to share their experiences and to make new friends. The following figure presents the frequency distribution of boys/girls who reported engaging in each type of social media practice:

Figure 5.3: Frequency distribution (%) of engagement in social media practices by boys/girls



Several chi-square tests have been conducted to investigate the associations of each of these types of social media practices with gender. The chi-square test results indicated that girls were more likely to report that they use their social media accounts to communicate

with friends, to share content that they have found online, to share content that they have created, as well as to share their thoughts, to see what other people are sharing and to share their interests. In comparison, boys were more likely than girls to use social media in order to play games. These findings resemble those from previous studies about gender differences in young people's use of social media, which have indicated that boys engage more in playing games online whereas girls tend to use their social media accounts more for social and relational reasons (Swist et al., 2015).

The type of school has been associated with some of the social media practices in which young people engage. It has been identified that students from state high schools were more likely to report that they share content that they found online (shown in Figure 5.3, above), whereas students from private high schools were less likely to report that they engage in this online practice. Moreover, students from evening/vocational high schools were less likely to report using their social media accounts to find information and read the news, whereas they were likely to report using social media to play games. On the other hand, students from private high schools were less likely to report engaging in playing games on social media. In addition, participants from private schools were less likely to use their social media profiles to share their thoughts and opinions. However, they were more likely to use social media to see what other people were sharing, whereas students from evening/vocational high schools were less likely to engage in this practice.

A strong statistical significance has been identified between parental educational level and participants' use of social media accounts in order to find information and read the news (Chi-square: X^2 (2, N = 436) =13.705, p = .001), as participants from lower educated backgrounds were less likely to report that they engage in this practice. By contrast, participants from medium educated backgrounds were more likely to report that they use their social media accounts in order to play games online (Chi-square: X^2 (2, N = 436)

=6.285, p = .043) and to share their interests (Chi-square: X^2 (2, N = 436) =7.501, p = .02446).

Regarding the educational uses of social media platforms, these uses were all strongly associated with gender, type of school and level of parental education, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 5.13[47]: Chi-square test results - Associations between educational uses of social media and gender/ethnikotita/type of school/level of parental education

	I use my social media to follow accounts with educational/scientific content	**I use my social media to connect to University/College's accounts**	**I use social media to read the news**
GENDER	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 14.705, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 11.364, ***p* =.001**	X^2 (1, *N* = 461) = 6.121, ***p* =.013**
ETHNIKOTITA	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 8.748, ***p* =.013**	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = 3.245, *p* =.197	X^2 (2, *N* = 449) = .772, *p* =.680[48]
TYPE OF SCHOOL	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =13.239, ***p* =.001**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =7.915, ***p* =.019**	X^2 (2, *N* = 463) =12.257, ***p* =.002**
LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) =7.592, ***p* = .022**	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) =6.450, ***p* = .040**	X^2 (2, *N* = 436) =12.344, ***p* = .002**[49]

Girls were more likely to use social media for educational purposes, with 32.3% of the participants who reported using their social media to follow accounts with educational/scientific content being girls, and 25.4% being boys. Similarly, among the participants who reported using social media to connect to University/College accounts, 26.9% were girls and 20.6% were boys. Furthermore, girls were more likely to report that they use social media in order to read the news (boys 84.5%; girls 91.9%).

A highly significant association was identified between type of school and connections to social media accounts with educational/scientific content. Students from vocational/evening schools were less likely to report following social media accounts with educational/scientific content. Students from vocational/evening high schools were more

[46] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.12.
[47] The cells of the table have been colour-coded. Grey coloured cells indicate significant associations.
[48] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.90.
[49] 1 cell (16.7%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.25

likely to report that they did not use their social media accounts to follow University/College accounts. In addition, participants from vocational/evening schools were more likely to report that they did not use social media to read the news.

Unsurprisingly, educational uses of social media were found to be associated with the level of parental education. Students whose parents belong to the lower educated group were less likely to report using social media in order to connect to accounts with educational/scientific content or to connect to University/College accounts. In addition, using social media in order to read the news was also less likely to be a practice adopted by students from lower educated backgrounds.

Finally, in relation to *ethnikotita*, it has been observed that participants whose parents were not Greek were more likely to answer that they did not use social media to follow accounts with educational or scientific content.

5.7 Aspects of identity in relation to social media engagement

The third section of the questionnaire involved questions about the relationship between social media engagement and aspects of identity. The findings indicate that the majority of participants feel that their online social media profiles reflect aspects of their identities (40.2%=A Bit True/34.1%=Very True). However, 25.7% of the respondents reported that their online profiles do not reflect who they are.

Table 5.14: Aspects of identity in relation to social media use: Frequency distribution and means (1= Not True, 2= A Bit True, 3= Very True)

	Not True (1)	**A Bit True (2)**	**Very True (3)**	
	Frequency %	Frequency %	Frequency %	MEAN
My online social media profiles reflect who I am	25.7%	40.2%	34.1%	2.08
I use social media accounts to express aspects of myself	44.5%	44%	11.5%	1.67
The social media platforms that I use have helped me discover new interests	22.2%	42.2%	35.7%	2.13
I get inspired about how I imagine myself in the future by things I have seen on social media platforms	43%	38.8%	18.2%	1.75

Almost half of the sample (44%=A Bit True/11.5%=Very True) expressed the view that they use their social media in order to express aspects of themselves, whereas 44.5% reported that this is 'Not True' of them. Moreover, a large number of respondents stated that their use of social media platforms has contributed to their discovery of new interests (42.2%=A Bit True/35.7%=Very True).

The imagined-self for nearly half of the participants (43%) does not relate to their use of social media, whereas 38.8% of the respondents stated that getting inspired about how they

imagine themselves in the future by things that they have seen online on social media is 'A Bit True' for them, while 18.2% expressed the view that this is 'Very True'.

5.7.1 Participants' social locations and identity related social media practices: Identified associations

As shown in the table below, gender is strongly associated with social media practices which relate to aspects of identity. More specifically, girls are more likely to use their social media accounts in order to express aspects of themselves. Girls are also more likely to express the view that their social media profiles reflect who they are, and they are also more likely to identify a relationship between something that they have seen on social media and the ways that they imagine themselves in the future.

Table 5.15[50]: Chi-square test results - Associations between social media practices related to identity and gender/ethnikotita/type of school/level of parental education

	I use my social media accounts to express aspects of myself	**My online profiles reflect who I am**	**The social media platforms that I use have helped me discover new interests**
GENDER	X^2 (2, *N* = 459) =17.997, ***p* =.000**	X^2 (2, *N* = 459) =13.372, ***p* =.001**	X^2 (2, *N* = 459) =8.024, ***p* =.018**
ETHNIKOTITA	X^2 (4, *N* = 448) =6.681, *p* =.154[51]	X^2 (4, *N* = 447) =4.198, *p* =.380	X^2 (4, *N* = 447) =7.300, *p* =.121
TYPE OF SCHOOL	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) =7.994, *p* =.092[52]	X^2 (4, *N* = 460) =10.978, ***p* =.027**	X^2 (4, *N* = 460) =3.067, *p* =.547
LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	X^2 (4, *N* = 434) =2.432, *p* =.657[53]	X^2 (4, *N* = 433) =5.298, *p* =.258[54]	X^2 (4, *N* = 433) =3.720, *p* =.445[55]

In order to present a more detailed account of the identified gender differences, the following table presents the frequency distribution of boys' and girls' responses. The table also includes the means of these responses. Interestingly, the estimated means of girls'

[50] The cells of the table have been colour-coded. Grey coloured cells indicate significant associations.
[51] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.02.
[52] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.83.
[53] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.35.
[54] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.94.
[55] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.39.

responses were higher than the average of boys' responses. Hence, on an average, girls agreed more than boys did with the following statements.

Table 5.16: Aspects of identity in relation to social media use of boys/girls: Frequency distribution and means (1= Not True, 2= A Bit True, 3= Very True)

	Not True (1)		**A Bit True (2)**		**Very True (3)**		***MEAN***	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
I use my social media accounts to express aspects of myself	61.8%	38.2%	45.5%	54.5%	34%	66%	1.54	1.81
My online social media profiles reflect who I am	63.2%	36.8%	52.4%	47.6%	41%	59%	1.96	2.21
The social media platforms that I use have helped me discover new interests	59.8%	40.2%	53.9%	46.1%	42.9%	57.1%	2.04	2.23

Furthermore, students from private schools were more likely to describe as 'Very True' the statement that their social media profiles represent who they are, whereas students from

vocational/evening high schools were more likely to disagree with that statement and report that it is 'Not True' (Chi-square: X^2 (4, N = 460) =10.978, p =.027).

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was also run to determine the relationship between participants' responses to the questions related to aspects of identity and the total number of social media platforms they use, as well as the frequency of their daily connections to social media. As presented below, in Table 5.17, all responses regarding aspects of identity were correlated to the total number of platforms that they use and the frequency of their daily connections.

Table 5.17: Spearman's correlation results – Correlations between Aspects of Identity and Number of social media platforms/Frequency of daily connections

	Total number of platforms used by participants	**Frequency of daily connections**[56]
I use social media accounts to express aspects of myself	$r_s(459) = .259$, $p = .000$	$r_s(459) = -.200$, $p = .000$
My online social media profiles reflect who I am	$r_s(458) = .272$, $p = .000$	$r_s(458) = -.192$, $p = .000$
The social media platforms that I use have helped me discover new interests	$r_s(458) = .312$, $p = .000$	$r_s(458) = -.234$, $p = .000$

Therefore, it can be concluded that as the total number of platforms used by participants increase, the degree of agreement with the above statements about identity increases as well. Hence, the analysis of the interviews with students who are among the most active users of social media platforms will be useful in order to understand further participants' views of the ways their social media practices relate to aspects of their identity.

[56] The Spearman correlation coefficient appears negative in the results reported in this column because in the survey questionnaire the responses about frequency of daily connections followed an inverse rank order to that of the responses about aspects of identity. Responses about the frequency of daily connections (1=almost constantly connected, 2=several times per day, 3=once a day, 4=I don't connect every day, 5=almost never/never) were in opposite order to the rank order of aspects of identity (1= Not True, 2=A Bit True, 3=Very True).

5.8 Future aspirations and social media engagement

The next section of the questions was related to participants' future aspirations. The vast majority of students expressed the will to continue their studies in Higher Education (81.5%=Very True, 10.2%=A Bit True) whereas only 8.3% reported that this is 'Not True'. A smaller number of students reported that they have already decided on the career that they want to pursue (51.2%=Very True, 33.4%=A Bit True). Engagement with social media platforms appears to relate to future aspirations for more than half of the students (43%=A Bit True, 24.4%= Very True), with 43% of them reporting that it was 'A Bit True' that something they had seen on social media had made them reflect on their future career aspirations. Nevertheless, 32.6% of the participants did not identify any relation between their future career aspirations and their use of social media.

The mean of the aforementioned elements of the questionnaire was estimated at 2.73 (1='Not True', 2='A Bit True', 3='Very True') about the first affirmation ('I want to get into University when I finish school', at 2.36 about the second affirmation ('I have decided on the profession/career that I want to pursue') and at 1.92 for the last sentence ('Something that I have seen on social media has made me think about my future career aspirations').

Table 5.18: Future aspirations: Frequency distribution and means (1= Not True, 2= A Bit True, 3= Very True)

	Not True (1)	**A Bit True (2)**	**Very True (3)**	
	Frequency %	Frequency %	Frequency %	MEAN
I want to get into University when I finish school	8.3%	10.2%	81.5%	2.73
I have decided on the profession/career that I want to pursue	15.4%	33.4%	51.2%	2.36
Something that I have seen on social media has made me think about my future career aspirations	32.6%	43%	24.3%	1.92

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was also run to determine the relationship between participants' responses to the questions about future aspirations and the total number of social media platforms they use, as well as they frequency of their daily connections to social media. As presented below, in Table 5.19, all responses regarding future aspirations were correlated to the total number of platforms that they use and the frequency of their daily connections.

Table 5.19: Spearman's correlation results – Correlations between Future aspirations and Number of social media platforms/Frequency of daily connections

	Total number of platforms used by participants	**Frequency of daily connections**[57]
I get inspired about how I imagine myself in the future by things I have seen on social media platforms	$r_s(459) = .337$, $p = .000$	$r_s(459) = -.175$, $p = .000$
Something that I have seen on social media has made me think about my future aspirations	$r_s(458) = .247$, $p = .000$	$r_s(458) = -.179$, $p = .000$

Therefore, it can be concluded that as the number of platforms used by participants increase, the degree of agreement with the above statements about future aspirations increases as well. The analysis of the interviews with students who are among the most active users of social media platforms will provide an understanding of participants' views concerning the ways their social media practices relate to their future aspirations.

5.8.1 Participants' social locations and future aspirations: Identified associations

Several associations have been identified between the influence of social media on the ways that young people imagine themselves in the future and gender, type of school and

[57] The Spearman correlation coefficient appears negative in the results reported in this column because in the survey questionnaire the responses about frequency of daily connections followed an inverse rank order to that of the responses about future aspirations. Responses about the frequency of daily connections (1=almost constantly connected, 2=several times per day, 3=once a day, 4=I don't connect every day, 5=almost never/never) were in opposite order to the rank order of future aspirations (1= Not True, 2=A Bit True, 3=Very True).

level of parental education (as shown in Table 5.20). Regarding gender, girls were more likely to report that they get inspired by social media. In addition, students attending private schools were more likely to report that this was 'Very True' of them, whereas students from evening/vocational schools were more likely to report that it was 'Not True'. In relation to parental educational level, it was indicated that participants from highly educated backgrounds are more likely to agree that this was 'Very True' of them, whereas students from lower educated backgrounds were more likely to express the view that it was 'Not True' of them.

Table 5.20: Chi-square test results - Associations between future aspirations and gender/ethnikotita/type of school/level of parental education

	I get inspired about how I imagine myself in the future by things I have seen on social media	**Something that I have seen on social media has made me think about my future career aspirations**	**I want to get into University when I finish school**	**I have decided the profession/career that I want to pursuit**
GENDER	X^2 (2, *N* = 459) =14.244, ***p* =.001**	X^2 (2, *N* = 458) =1.069, *p* =.586	X^2 (2, *N* = 458) =5.641, *p* =.060	X^2 (2, *N* = 458) =5.771, *p* =.056
ETHNIKOTITA	X^2 (4, *N* = 448) =3.165, *p* =.531[58]	X^2 (4, *N* = 447) =.933, *p* =.920	**[59]	X^2 (4, *N* = 448) =2.818, *p* =.589[60]
TYPE OF SCHOOL	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) =18.193, ***p* =.001**	X^2 (4, *N* = 460) =3.750, *p* =.441	**	X^2 (4, *N* = 461) =3.702, *p* =.448
LEVEL OF PARENTAL EDUCATION	X^2 (4, *N* = 436) =15.003, ***p* = .005[61]**	X^2 (4, *N* = 433) =1.214, *p* =.876[62]	**	X^2 (4, *N* = 434) =5.107, *p* =.277[63]

[58] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.70.
[59] The symbol (**) is used in order to indicate that the Chi-square test results cannot be reported because although there was an estimated p value less than .05, the contingency tables had more than 20% of expected frequencies less than 5 and therefore the results cannot be considered reliable (Field, 2018).
[60] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.95.
[61] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.73.
[62] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.76.
[63] 1 cell (11.1%) has expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.09.

5.9 The importance of the 'social' in the use of social media: Insights from the quantitative analysis

The descriptive statistics about participants' use of social media presented in this chapter have revealed several similarities to previous studies from various contexts.

In the British context, Ofcom's (2017) report on adult media use presented Facebook as the platform which most participants reported as their main social media account. However, in the same report it is also argued that among the sample, participants aged between 16 and 24 years old were less likely than the average to report that Facebook was their main social media account and were more likely than the general sample to select Snapchat, Twitter or Instagram as their main account. In the U.S. context, a recent report has also identified that although the majority of Americans use Facebook and YouTube, young people use Instagram and Snapchat more heavily (Anderson and Jiang, 2018; Smith and Anderson, 2018).

The EU Kids Online project national report (2012) presented the finding that 65% of 13-16 year olds in Greece were using Facebook, a number which is lower than the figure reported in the findings of the current study (89.2%) for 14-17 year olds living in Athens. Although the current findings indicate a significant increase in the number of teens using Facebook, it should be noted that the age group is slightly different to the one used in the EU Kids Online project; also, the sample of the present study is concentrated in Athens (the capital of Greece), unlike that in the EU Kids Online findings which involved participants from various locations in Greece.

Regarding the types of social media practices in which young people engage, the findings show that participants reported using their social media accounts for communicative and informational purposes ('To keep in touch with friends', 'To find information and read the news', 'To see what other people are sharing'). Therefore, these findings support boyd's (2014: 32) argument that teenagers' social media practices reflect social motivations and

that they are ‘not compelled by gadgetry as such – they are compelled by friendship’. However, apart from maintaining their social relationships, these findings indicate that students seek to discover new information through the social media platforms that they use. In addition, more than half of the sample (57.9%) reported using their social media profiles in order to follow accounts with educational or scientific content. Therefore, it can be argued that young people are using social media as another means of exploring new educational and informational resources.

In addition, almost half of the participants (47.5%) reported using their social media accounts in order to connect to Universities or Colleges. Hence, students reported an instrumental use of their social media accounts, as they use them to further explore their educational options and access online resources related to their future aspirations. These educational and instrumental uses indicate that social media platforms are not regarded by young people solely as spaces for entertainment and communication, but also as spaces where they can access and navigate new sources of knowledge.

Previous studies have found that social media have become important spaces in which young people can express themselves and explore their identities (Green et al., 2011; Colás et al., 2013; boyd, 2014). The findings of the present study regarding identity and social media showcase a contradiction. On the one hand, the majority of students feel that their social media accounts represent who they are (40.2% reported that this is ‘A Bit True’ and 34.1% reported that this is ‘Very True’), but on the other hand almost half of the participants denied that they use social media in order to express aspects of themselves. Therefore, it is interesting to explore in more depth, through the qualitative analysis, what young people’s views are regarding the ways their use of social media may relate to their identities.

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the students reported that they aspire to attend university after finishing high school. As discussed in Chapter 3 (‘Developing identities

and future aspirations in the digital age: An overview of the literature'), in the Greek context students have traditionally developed strong aspirations to enter a Higher Education institution. However, it is important to investigate further, through the analysis of the students' interviews, which aspirations they hold and how these are being shaped, especially in relation to social media practices, since several participants reported having reflected on their aspirations after seeing something on social media (43% reported that this was 'A Bit True' and 24.3%, 'Very True').

The aim of the present study is not to simply describe the types of social media platforms and practices in which young people engage, but also to identify the potential associations with participants' social locations. In the US context, socio-economic variables such as gender, ethnicity and household income have been associated with several differences in the types of platforms and level of engagement (Lenhart, 2015). Teenagers from wealthier backgrounds were more likely to use the Snapchat platform, African-American and Hispanic youth reported being online more often than White teenagers, whereas girls engaged more in visually-oriented platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr, and boys were more likely to play games online (Lenhart, 2015).

As presented earlier, gender appears to play an important role in the types of social media platforms and practices in which young people engage. More specifically, it has been observed that girls are more likely to use their social media accounts more frequently and also that they engage in more social media platforms. These findings indicate that in the Greek context as well, girls use social media more often and are more frequent users of visual-based social media platforms, as has been observed in other studies (Swist et al., 2015). Furthermore, regarding the types of online social media practices, girls were more likely to use their accounts in order to share their own content and their personal interests, thoughts and opinions. Moreover, girls are more likely to express the view that their social media accounts reflect aspects of their identity; they are also more likely to use their

accounts to follow university or other educational/scientific accounts. These findings indicate that the use of social media platforms by girls displays more personal, social and relational motivations. However, the qualitative analysis is required in order to provide a deeper understanding of these practices and the identified gendered differences.

Furthermore, the quantitative analysis revealed significant differences in the educational uses of social media between students attending different types of schools and also in relation to the level of parental education. The differences between students from evening/vocational high schools and students attending private schools can be used to argue that young people's social characteristics frame their online social media experiences and therefore, that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds may have restricted online opportunities and may develop less sophisticated uses, even though they have equal access to online platforms. Consequently, one of the aims of the qualitative analysis will be to develop an understanding of participants' narratives about their online practices in order to identify how their practices may relate to the social context they live in.

CHAPTER 6: Developing identities

The questionnaire findings presented in Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece') indicated that young people engage in a variety of social media practices and revealed several associations between social media usage and participants' social locations (gender, type of school, level of parental education, *ethnikotita*). The aim of the present chapter is to discuss the semi-structured interview findings which will contribute to the development of an in-depth understanding of young people's social media practices. The interviews were designed to encourage participants to discuss how their social media practices relate to their identities. Hence, the analysis of the qualitative findings will provide understanding of the ways in which young people's online social media practices relate to their identities (RQ2), as well as of the ways that social media practices are influenced by participants' social locations (RQ4).

6.1 An overview of the interview sample

The following table includes the details of the participating schools as well as the number of participants recruited from each school:

Table 6.1: Participating schools' details (Interviews phase)

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS	DISTRICT AREA[64]	SCHOOL DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
STATE SCHOOL 1	A' of Athens	State-funded school located in the most central district of Athens. Students are enrolled in the school according to their home address; therefore, they are residents of the same area as the school.	6 (1 boy, 5 girls)
STATE SCHOOL 2	East Attica	State-funded school located in a suburban area of Athens. Students are enrolled in the school according to their home address; therefore, they are residents of the same area as the school.	7 (1 boy, 6 girls)
STATE SCHOOL 3	C' of Athens	State-funded school located in one of the largest populated suburban areas of Athens. Students are enrolled in the school according to their home address, therefore they are residents of the same area as the school.	10 (3 boys, 7 girls)
PRIVATE SCHOOL 1	A' of Athens	Private school located in central Athens. Students across different areas of Athens are enrolled in the school. The annual study fees during the academic year 2017-18 were estimated at €5,600 (excluding school transport fees).	11 (4 boys, 7 girls)
PRIVATE SCHOOL 2	B' of Athens	Private school located in one of the wealthiest suburbs of Athens. Students across different areas of Athens are enrolled in the school. The school offers students interested in studies abroad the International Baccalaureate programme. The annual study fees during the academic year 2017-18 were estimated at €9,735 (excluding school transport fees).	7 (2 boys, 5 girls)
STATE EVENING SCHOOL	D' of Athens	State-funded evening school located in a suburb of Athens. It operates in the evenings and students who are working during the day are enrolled in the school.	4 (3 boys, 1 girl)

[64] A map which depicts all district areas has been presented in Section 4.2.1.

In total 45 students participated in the interview phase of this study. As explained in Chapter 4 ('Methodology'), among other things, the questionnaire was used to recruit participants to the interview. Although students from all participating schools were invited to the interviews, participants were recruited from six out of the ten schools which participated in the questionnaire due to a lack of volunteers in the four remaining schools. Of the six participating schools, three were state schools, two were private and one was an evening state school[65]. Among the interviewees, 23 attended state schools, 18 private schools and four participants attended the evening state school.

Regarding gender, 14 participants identified as boys and 31 as girls. As indicated in Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece'), girls were more likely to report that they use social media more frequently; they also reported engaging in more social media practices than boys. One of the main sampling criteria for the interview phase was to invite participants who were among the most active users of social media (as explained in Section 4.2); therefore, more girls were invited to participate in the interviews. This factor can explain the disproportionate participation of boys and girls in the interview phase.

As evidenced in Table 6.1, the participating schools have diverse characteristics and altogether form a contrasted sample. Students were enrolled in different types of institutions, which were located in various parts of Athens (including the city centre and suburban areas). This diversity served the purpose of the study, as the aim in the interview phase was to invite students from diverse social locations. (Detailed socio-demographic information of all interview participants is included in Appendix V.)

Although students attending state schools reported diverse characteristics regarding parental occupation and parental educational level, students from private schools reported higher levels of parental education and higher occupational positions, whereas students

[65] All types of schools have been discussed in Section 4.2.1.

from evening schools reported lower levels of parental education and lower occupational positions. Taking into further consideration the information about the annual study fees of the participating private schools[66], it can be argued that students attending private schools came from more affluent backgrounds, whereas students attending evening school came from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Regarding private schools, previous research findings reported by the OECD (2011), about differences in school characteristics between state and private schools in several European countries, indicated that in Greece there was a significant association between students' socio-economic status and the type of school, as students attending private schools reported a higher socio-economic status.

6.2 Types of social media practices

In Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece'), an overview of participants' online social media practices has been presented. Quantitative findings indicated that among the most popular types of social media practices are 'keeping in touch with friends', 'finding information and reading the news' and 'viewing what other people are sharing'. These findings are consistent with research reports from the European, U.S. and Australian contexts (Green et al., 2011; boyd, 2014; EU Kids Online, 2014; Swist et al., 2015). To provide a deeper understanding of young people's social media practices, the interviews involved questions about the main reasons for using each of their social media accounts and their experiences of and views on engaging in social media practices.

During the interviews, participants were asked to discuss their main social media practices. In accordance with the quantitative findings, most of the interview participants reported that one of their main social media practices was 'to communicate with friends', as well as 'to read the news and be informed about what is happening', and to browse online content posted by others in order 'to see what other people are posting'. Apart from these practices, during the interview phase several participants explained how they used their social media

[66] There was not any case of a scholarship-awarded student participating in this study.

accounts to discover online resources related to their personal interests, to socialise, to engage in creative activities and to entertain themselves.

Sections 6.2.1 to 6.2.5 will provide an analysis of the qualitative findings about the main social media practices as reported in the interviews and will discuss young people's varied understandings of their use of social media. The qualitative findings regarding the types of social media practices which were discussed by young people during the interviews have been grouped in five thematic categories: communicational, supporting and expanding personal interests, creative expression, content curation and differentiation of uses.

6.2.1 Communicational

All participants reported engaging in instant messaging and talking to friends through online chats. Another social media practice, which served a communicational purpose, was participating in discussions through online social media groups created around a common interest (e.g. Facebook groups about movies, online gaming community groups).

Participants' narratives about their communicational practices demonstrated a variety of understandings about what 'communication' on social media means to them. All participants in this study reported that they use social media as a means of communication. The majority described one of their main social media practices as to 'talk to friends' and 'communicate with other people'. The communicational use of social media platforms by teens has been reported in many previous studies as among the most common practices in which young people engage online (Green et al., 2011; boyd, 2014; EU Kids Online, 2014). For most of the students, 'chatting' online was presented as the main way of communicating with friends because of practical reasons as they found it easier, faster and more inexpensive than calling or sending text messages. Unsurprisingly, participants also explained that social media platforms enable communication with friends or family members who live abroad, or with people who they do not see in person often. For

example, for many participants conversing through Facebook was understood as a preferable alternative to using a phone.

Most of the communicative practices described by the participants were related to the Facebook platform (through the Messenger application) and Snapchat. Instant messaging was described by many participants as a normative communicational practice among their peers "because everyone is there now" (*Student 35, girl, Private School 2, Greek*). Communicating through social media was presented as part of their peer-culture and more relevant to their generation:

> "Facebook is the modern way of communicating with other people; for example if we want to plan to go out we will talk on Messenger. Talking by phone is a bit outdated, it is not cool, so that's why we use Facebook." (*Student 12, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

As Student 37 explained, the fact that almost every one of her peers uses Facebook's Messenger to communicate constitutes an important rationale for creating an account on this particular platform in the first place:

> "I use [Facebook] Messenger more often than any other account because I want to communicate with my friends and this was the initial reason that I created my account on Facebook. I was never the type of person that really wanted to use Facebook, to post things or photos as many people do, to check-in and all these things. I mostly wanted to have a way of communicating with my friends." (*Student 37, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

The most interesting aspects of participants' narratives however, are the particularities of communication through social media platforms as described by themselves. As several students explained, they particularly enjoy the fact that online communication enables a multimodal way of communicating:

> "I really like the way that I can communicate through social media. I like this type of communication that I can have with others and that I can send photos and videos; it is something very interesting." (*Student 2, girl, State School 1, Greek*)

All participants reported engaging daily in this practice and it appeared to be an important (and almost essential) way of communicating with their peers. Although most of the participants explained that the people they communicate with online are their close friends with whom they also engage in face-to-face communication on a daily basis, there were also some participants who reported communicating with people who did not belong to their group of offline friends or acquaintances. One of the participants (Student 1, *boy, State School 1, Greek*) reported communicating with people whose acquaintance had been made online, for example through an online platform about gaming, but also through commenting on gaming videos on YouTube. Hence, in his case, communication is not restricted to people known through offline social networks.

Furthermore, two participants reported that they communicate online with people that they had met online by participating in online groups related to their interests. Therefore, to them social media platforms were used not only to communicate with friends and acquaintances but also to expand their social networks and to socialise with new people. However, the majority of interview participants reported communicating on social media platforms with people who belong to their offline social networks as well.

The participants who reported communicating with people they had met online explained that they started participating in online groups related to their interests in order to meet new people and make new friends:

> "I use social media to make new friends. I get to know new friends online and then we arrange to meet somewhere. For example, on Saturday I will get to meet many new people. I first get to know them online through fan groups on social media. For

example, it can be a group for a favourite music band or for youtubers." (*Student 5, girl, State School 1, Filipino*)

"On Facebook I also talk in groups that I have joined and they are related to my interests. For example, there is a group about movies and there are group discussions where we talk. At the beginning I didn't know the other people but after some meet-ups I got to know them and then we came close and we bonded outside social media as well." (*Student 30, boy, Private School 1, Greek*)

Joining online groups on Facebook was reported by these two participants as a social media practice in which they engage to socialise and expand their offline social network – a practice which illustrates the fuzzy boundaries between the 'offline' and 'online' worlds. Both participants explained how they used their Facebook accounts to join groups related to their interests with the aim of meeting new people. They both reported that they joined these online groups not only to communicate with people who share the same interests, but also to get to know them and to make new friends. Interestingly, these two students come from very different social locations. Student 5 is a Filipino girl attending a state school, whereas Student 30 is a Greek boy attending a private school. Their descriptions of how they decided to use social media in order to meet new people were very similar. Both described the process of planning a 'meet-up' after joining the online group and engaging in online discussions, and explained that their common interests with the people from online groups provided the initial reason to connect. As Student 30 describes it below, the social media platform enabled him to meet people that he couldn't easily find in his existing offline social networks:

"What brought us closer at the beginning were our common interests. I joined these groups because of my interests but also because I would like to meet people with similar interests. Well, OK, I hadn't planned the discussions that we would have in advance, before actually meeting the people. I didn't know in advance that I would

> participate in discussions, but yes, I wanted to talk about things that interest me and I know how to talk about them and in general I cannot find many people like them here easily." (Student 30, *boy, Private School 1, Greek*)

Another participant also referred to the use of social media as a way to re-connect with acquaintances from the past, hence indicating another way of expanding offline social networks. He referred to meeting new people, but stressed that these activities required a level of criticality to avoid a risky situation.

> "On social media, if you are careful enough you can also meet new people. If you are careful and you can think critically. You can also re-connect with old friends from school or from your previous neighbourhood, all these things." (*Student 16, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

As indicated in the quote above, young people who reported engaging in communication with strangers on social media appeared aware of the risks which may lurk in these activities, without however discussing in detail how they manage these risks. Previous studies about online risks have reported similar findings, arguing that there are adolescents who voluntarily participate in risky online communication by agreeing to meet with strangers, a behaviour which is more common among adolescents around the age of 15 (Junger-Tas et al., 2004; Stamoulis and Farley, 2010; Notten and Nikken, 2016).

It has also been argued that there are strong gender differences, as it has been observed that boys participate more in risky communication behaviours, although more girls report that their online activities may have resulted in an undesirable situation (Fogel and Nehmad, 2009; Livingstone and Haddon, 2009; Ringrose and Barajas, 2011; Baumgartner, 2013; Sasson and Mesch, 2014; Notten and Nikken, 2016). In the present study, it has been observed that among the three participants who reported engaging in online communication with strangers, two were boys and one was a girl, indicating a similar

pattern of gender differences. However, a larger sample and a study focusing on risky online communication would be needed to explore the question of whether there is a significant gender association.

6.2.2 Supporting and expanding personal interests

Most of the participants mentioned that browsing online content related to their personal interests was one of their most common social media practices. More specifically, they reported following accounts online to discover photos, videos and articles related to their interests (music, arts, fashion, movies, sports, drawing, photography, beauty, celebrities, etc.). One participant explained that his main interest is gaming and he reported using social media platforms to communicate with people who were playing the same video game:

> "I participate in networks related to gaming. The PlayStation network for example. I talk to friends who also play the same games as me there, but also with other people that I don't know personally, and they live abroad but you can talk with them and we can even discuss about how to do something together in the game and play together." (*Student 1, boy, State School 1, Greek*)

Student 1 has developed an instrumental use of these networks which is related to his gaming interests. As he goes on to explain, he especially enjoys the sense of belonging to a wider community created by his participation in these online discussions. He also describes how this sense of community is created between people who do not know each other offline and may live in different countries, but who collaborate to achieve a common goal and help other members of the community.

> "Regarding YouTube, I enjoy so much this 'community' which is created there. Not always, because usually when something good is created, something bad is created as well. But many times, this 'community' is a very good thing, it depends

on the community which you enter. In a gaming community for example, if you go on YouTube you can see that foreign people come together and get united. Personally, I believe that gaming brings people together, contrary to what many research studies say about the effects of gaming. I believe that people get united and they collaborate. Because for example someone will help you to reach the next level in the game." (*Student 1, boy, State School 1, Greek*)

There were also some participants who reported that their main reason for using social media was to support their interests. For this purpose, they were using specific social media platforms which are explicitly designed to connect users to communities related to their interests, such as the online platform 'Amino[67]':

"Tumblr and Amino, both are platforms that I use to search for things related to my interests. I use them to discover photos or to discover content about things that interest me and I want to learn about, to read news, what is happening in the world, about series, movies, books." (*Student 33, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

In addition, some participants reported that they liked to share their own interests by posting relevant photos/videos/articles on their social media accounts; they also liked to find out about their friends' interests. In addition, they reported that engagement in such social media practices has led to an expansion of their personal interests.

"On YouTube you discover interesting things which you then might search more. It motivates you to engage more with something that you became interested in." (*Student 15, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

As Student 15 explains, by using social media they can access more resources related to their interests and this may intensify their engagement with these interests. A distinctive case, however, was reported by one of the participants who described how his instrumental

[67] A brief description of all social media platforms mentioned in the present study is provided in Appendix I.

use of Facebook led to his hobby being turned into a ‘professional activity’. He described how he used Facebook to create his own page online, where he could present his creations and reach a wider audience:

> “I use Facebook to join groups related to my interests. My hobby is modelling, constructing miniatures of aircrafts and other things. So, I joined groups about modelling on Facebook. I was interested in modelling before seeing anything on social media but then I started searching more things in online forums and then on Facebook. And my interest became more intense. I also use Facebook to present my work now. Recently, I created my own page on Facebook to present my work and to receive orders from customers. I now sell the things that I create. Now, modelling for me is not just a hobby, it is mainly a professional activity. Whatever I construct, I sell it through Facebook.” (*Student 24, boy, Private School 1, Greek*)

6.2.3 Creative expression

Some participants described how they use certain social media platforms to engage in creative practices. Several of them reported taking photos of landscapes and editing them in order to post them on their social media profiles. Many of them also saw the process of posting photos as a creative process, like *Student 8* (*girl, State School 2, Albanian*) who explained:

> “I really enjoy taking photos and posting them, I take photos of landscapes and things like that and I create my own ‘webpage’. I really enjoy that, it is so nice.”

However, there were two students who reported engaging in more advanced creative practices. Both explained that their use of two different social media platforms inspired them to engage in the practices of video creation and creative writing. The first student described how she learnt using video editing software, then started creating videos and posting them on the YouTube platform:

> "I spend a lot of hours on YouTube. I like watching videos and I also discovered that I like creating videos, so I created some. I started doing that when it was the birthday of my best friend, where I tried to make a video for her birthday bringing together many videos that I had of her, and YouTube helped me to do it. I watched other people's videos and tutorials and I got inspired by them." (*Student 14, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

The case of the other student (Student 6, *girl, State School 1, Greek/Albanian)* was particularly interesting, as she explained how she started writing her own book online after participating in the 'Wattpad' online platform. This participant was very enthusiastic about her use of this platform, on which she started reading stories written by other users and her engagement led her to start writing her own novel. As she explained, there are specific affordances provided by the online context of the Wattpad platform that contributed to her engagement in the creative practice of writing. She also drew a clear distinction between the online and offline contexts of writing a novel, as she associates the online context with greater freedom and authenticity.

> "I write some poems and stories. I started writing my own novel now. This happened because of Wattpad. If I haven't been on Wattpad I wouldn't have realised that I have a talent in writing or that I love writing. What I like the most is that in there, there are kids that they don't have anything to do with what older people think about teens, there are kids that express themselves in ways that no one would expect, as if they are professional writers and I also like that I can feel exactly how the main characters feel, because I can relate to them. I have learnt much more things about life through these stories than through my everyday life." (*Student 6, girl, State School 1, Greek/Albanian*)

> "I like to read normal, printed books as well but what I like about Wattpad is that each person who writes a story in there is putting a part of themselves in it. On

> Wattpad people don't write their novels with the aim to earn money, but because they love what they do. That's the difference with an author who will get paid to write a book. I prefer reading novels on Wattpad, because I prefer whatever is real. So, I will go there to read, because in there, there will be people like me." (*Student 6, girl, State School 1, Greek/Albanian*)

Throughout the interview, she stressed several times that anonymity, the sense of community, the sense of freedom to express yourself and the communication with other people 'like you' were the main reasons that made the Wattpad platform special to her. She described how anonymity made her feel free to practise writing and share her work, overcoming the fear of being criticised. Sending and receiving feedback from other users was also described as crucial to her engagement. The sense of belonging to a community with people like herself, out of sight of adults, was one of the characteristics which she stressed several times. She explained that she has not shared her interest in writing or her stories with her parents because she believes that they would not fully understand her engagement, and because her stories are written for teenagers. Therefore, this online platform offered her the desired audience with whom to share her creative work.

6.2.4 Content curation and content consumption

The majority of participants referred to content curation practices such as sharing photos, songs, videos, checking-in places that they visit, and posting articles, and to content consumption practices which included viewing what others post on social media, watching videos, listening to music and reading articles. Most of them emphasised that they use social media mostly to view content rather than to post, engaging more in content consumption practices. Several of the participants who discussed content curation practices referred to posting photos and explained that they engage in this online practice whenever there is a 'significant' moment in their lives that they would like to share with others.

Therefore, they regard social media as a space where they share memorable moments of their lives.

> "What I post depends on the situation that I am in. If we go to a school trip I will post a photo or something with my friends and I will write something. But what I do is that I post only if I think that something is important to be posted, whenever there is something in my life that I consider important or that I want to remember, then I will post it." (*Student 27, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

> "I like sharing my 'moments' there, I like to create my own world." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

Several participants mentioned that through social media they can view content from different parts of the world that they would not otherwise be able to see, stressing the variety and diversity of the content that they can access through some platforms. In addition, some of the participants mentioned that they use social media in order to read other people's opinions about various issues and to take part in discussions if they feel that they want to express their own views. Therefore, they see social media as a way not only to access and explore various places but also to participate in discussions which they think they would not be able to access otherwise.

Another form of content consumption on social media platforms was related to entertainment. As expected, most of the participants reported using social media for entertainment purposes, especially the YouTube platform, which they use to watch videos, shows and series as well as to listen to music and discover new artists. Many of them explained that YouTube to them is a substitute for watching shows and series on TV:

> "I don't watch TV at all, so YouTube is the perfect substitute, there are better comedy shows on YouTube and I also watch trailers and I listen to music." (*Student 17, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

Reading was also mentioned as one of the practices that they engage in. A smaller number of participants, comparing to those who reported watching videos and listening to music, mentioned using the Wattpad platform in order to read short stories and novels written by other users online:

> "I use Wattpad mostly during my free time. I like it because it is like having a book to read and I just sit down to read stories written by others. It is very relaxing and I just break free from school stuff and homework. And because I have Wattpad on my phone, I actually have with me the stories as well, a book for example wouldn't be easy to carry around." (*Student 30, boy, Private School 1, Greek*)

6.2.5 Differentiation of uses: Multiple platforms enable different practices

Young people's narratives about their online practices revealed a differentiation of their uses and attitudes across different social media platforms. The affordances provided on each social media platform frame the practices in which users engage; many of the participants reported how they use each platform for different purposes and how they engage in different practices. Firstly, they described different attitudes towards privacy according to the context of each social media platform:

> "On Facebook I just have friends that I also know offline and my profile is private. My Instagram account is public but I don't post anything personal there. I just post landscape photos or some photos which are not very personal so it is OK even if someone from the public audience sees them." (*Student 11, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

The above narrative indicates not only a different attitude towards managing privacy on each platform but also how the audience of each platform determines the development of these attitudes. Many of the participants explained how different audiences exist on each of

the platforms. The differences in audiences were also referred to as a reason for choosing or not engaging more with some platforms.

> "I really like Instagram because contrary to Facebook which restricts you to your friends and acquaintances, Instagram is more open." (*Student 26, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

For some participants the choice of a platform was based on whether most of their offline friends are using the same one. Having a bigger or more diverse audience which includes contacts that do not belong to participants' offline networks was also described as a reason to choose a specific platform:

> "I use Facebook more because this is where most accounts are, most users and therefore where most of my common friends are." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

Apart from social connections with friends, family and peers, having an audience which provides visibility and recognition is a significant affordance of social media platforms (boyd, 2014). The importance of having an audience was linked to a sense of social approval by some of the participants in this study. As expressed by one of the participants, popular platforms are preferred because they generate more exposure, as measured by the number of views and 'Likes'. To this participant, 'Likes' are related to a sense of recognition and approval by others which is relevant to his use of social media:

> "Snapchat, I don't use it so much because it is not so mainstream. And let's be honest, most people just follow what is trendy and they like being mainstream, so they prefer Instagram. On Instagram I have more views, so I don't use Snapchat much. If you have a lot of views you feel that someone cares about you, although you know that this is virtual. But again, you feel that someone cared and was

> interested to see your everyday life, even if it is through photos." (*Student 16, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

However, a contrasting opinion was expressed by another participant who explained how the different practices that are enabled by each platform influenced her choice of platforms. As she sees it, Instagram and Facebook focus on types of practices related to gossip and personal information, whereas she preferred platforms which she saw as enabling learning and expanding her personal interests:

> "I have accounts on Facebook and Instagram, but I don't use them. I don't believe that I can relate to Facebook; it has become more like a trap. We are focused on what we want others to know about us and we are not interested in us learning about the world, about what is happening. We focus on knowing what someone else is doing and to comment about it or to 'like' what they do. And in Instagram is the same. They do not offer me the type of information that I would like to get." (*Student 33, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

6.3 Identity performance on social media platforms

The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire findings, as presented in Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece'), indicated that the majority of the questionnaire participants feel that their online social media profiles reflect aspects of their selves (40.2%=A Bit True/34.1%=Very True). However, 25.7% of the respondents reported that their online profiles do not reflect 'who they are'. During the interviews, participants were asked about the content they choose to share about themselves on their social media profiles and they were also asked to discuss whether their self-presentation online reflects 'who they are'. The qualitative analysis of the interview findings indicated that gender differences exist regarding self-presentation on social media. In addition, participants discussed how their authentic or polished online self-presentation relates to their offline lives.

6.3.1. Self-presentation on social media: Gender differences

Participants were asked to discuss what they were sharing about themselves through their social media accounts. Although previous studies about the use of social media by young people have stressed that it enables connection with peers, it has also been identified that these media are used by young people for self-presentation and identity performance (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011). In the present study, participants' narratives revealed several gender differences regarding their self-presentation on social media, but almost all participants, both boys and girls, reported that their online profiles present only some aspects of themselves and that for someone to understand who they really are, the other individual should also know them in person.

Most boys explained that they prefer not to post personal photographs through their social media profiles. They reported that their online self-presentation practices consist more of posting about their personal interests (sports, music, etc.) and offline activities than of actually posting photos of themselves, their personal opinions or other personal information. In particular, most boys reported that they consider it unnecessary to post photos of themselves and they appeared to be cautious about such practices of self-presentation:

> "I don't post photos of myself. I don't do it because it's not something I like, there is no reason to do it. I support the view that there is no reason to do it, it's not that I am afraid of something, I just don't find any meaning in doing it." (*Student 1, boy, State School 1, Greek*)

> "I believe that if someone sees my profiles online, he can see the basic stuff about me. I don't have many things about me online because I feel that it is not necessary to do it, if not dangerous. It is not necessary because with the people that I talk to online, I already know them, so they know already what type of person I am, so I

> don't have to include many things about me on my profiles. It is not necessary and I mostly use it to communicate." (*Student 15, boy, State School 2, Greek*)

Girls were more likely to report that they post photographs of themselves on their social media profiles, but both boys and girls argued that their online profiles do not represent fully who they are because they only include limited personal information and represent only some aspects of their selves:

> "I am not sure to what extent my Facebook profile reflects who I am because I don't post many personal stuff so you cannot understand my personality through it because also I don't post daily, I post very rarely so I don't think that someone can really understand me through that." (*Student 18, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

> "Through my profiles I present things related to my everyday life, not my personal views. Mainly because I don't want someone to form an opinion about me just through a social media platform." (*Student 21, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

> "My profiles represent who I am but they don't have enough things to understand my personality; you will have to talk to me to understand my personality, my views and all these. But in terms of appearance, yes." (*Student 32, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

Although there were some cases of girls who explained that they prefer to share their personal interests on social media, rather than other personal information, in general girls were more likely to report that they post photographs of some personal moments in their everyday lives. Most girls admitted that their self-presentations online focus more on their physical appearance. This focus may be explained by the challenge faced by girls to express sexualised hyper-feminine gender roles which stem from stereotypical and body-objectified self-concepts as promoted by the media (Livingstone and Mason, 2015; Barbovschi et al., 2017).

In previous studies, online self-presentation has been linked to psychosocial variables such as self-esteem, with findings suggesting that students with lower self-esteem engage in self-promotional behaviour on social media platforms (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Moreno et al., 2011; Michikyan et al., 2015). Regarding gender and self-presentation online, previous research findings have suggested that girls' efforts at edited online self-presentation are underpinned by feelings of low self-esteem (Chua and Chang, 2016). Edited online self-presentation practised in order to present a more 'polished' version of their selves online was discussed by some participants in the present study, an issue which will be discussed in the following section.

6.3.2 'Real' versus 'fake' self-presentation on social media

Contrary to participants who engaged in limited self-presentation online practices as described above, there were also several participants who admitted engaging more with self-presentation practices and identity performance online. However, among these participants there were two contrasting viewpoints. Some reported that social media affordances enable people to be their 'real-selves' online, whereas others supported the view that social media may enable fake or inflated representations.

The literature about self-concept has focused on cognitive processes occurring during adolescence, which, along with socialisation pressures, lead to the development of different selves in different social contexts, leaving young people with the question of which is their 'real' self (Harter and Monsour, 1992; Harter et al., 1996; Harter et al., 1997; Michikyan et al., 2015). Online self-presentation is a common practice among young people on social media who display their individual and social identities and also may engage in self-enhancing posts which reflect an idealised or desirable image (Manago et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2008; Michikyan et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2017).

According to Yang and Brown (2016), online self-presentation is shaped upon four dimensions: breadth (the amount of shared information about oneself), depth (the intimacy

of the information shared, whether it contains thoughts, emotions, etc.), positivity (how positive or negative the presented image is) and authenticity (how close the presented image is to a genuine representation of the self).

Authenticity was discussed by several participants in the present study. Regarding the viewpoint on being your 'real self' online, one participant explained that the freedom of expression in social media enables everyone to present 'who they really are'. She also compared the way online contexts may provide a sense of a more open and safer space for 'being your true self', by contrast with the offline environment. This freedom was directly related to the specific affordances provided in online spaces (unlike the offline space), where you can control your audience as well as the aspects of yourself which you choose to present to that audience:

> "I am my real self on social media. I believe that in general on social media we choose to be, mainly we choose to present ourselves without having something to feel scared about. Because we have certain people who want to follow our accounts and we want to show to these people that we are who we are, without feeling afraid of getting bullied about it or without feeling afraid that they will talk bad to us. Because all these are behind a screen, it is not real life." (*Student 23, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

By contrast with that viewpoint, another participant explained how people use social media to present more polished versions of themselves which do not reflect their 'real-selves' offline:

> "I believe that social media platforms, and Facebook in particular, are there for us to use them to post things about ourselves and to see things about others and to show our real self, at least as much as we can. But there are people who post things about themselves, even photos, that don't have anything to do with reality. They try

to present a different self to what they really are." (*Student 3, girl, State School 1, Greek*)

"No, my profiles don't really represent who I am. As I said, I just post photos when something good is happening. I must seem a bit happier on social media and a bit more active, that I do more things than what I actually do in reality. But I try to do it in a way that when somebody sees it, he wouldn't say 'no way this is you, you are different in real life'." (*Student 27, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

As Goffman (1959) argued, people attempt to create impressions about themselves to achieve certain goals. As described by the participant above, social media can enable the process of impression management because online profiles can be used to present a more polished version of the self to others. Another participant provided a particularly interesting case of how impression management is enacted through online social media profiles. As he explains below, he used his online profile to change the ways his peers positioned him at school:

"I want to show through my social media that I am having a good time, because some kids at school might have a different impression about me, so if they see what I post they might understand that I have a different side of personality than what they think. A student like me for example, might not have many close friends at school, may not be very popular and the other kids at school might think that I am a bit of an introvert or anti-social. But I might be closer with kids who don't go to the same school as me, so I post photos with them, photos which show that we are having fun, that we do crazy things etc. and these photos provide a clearer picture of who I am to my classmates." (*Student 40, boy, Private School 2, Greek*)

The case of this student highlights how the online context is used to navigate offline relationships with his classmates. Self-presentation online has been associated with the

need for social connections which may act as a driving force for self-disclosure on social media platforms (Wang et al., 2014; Buglass et al., 2017). In this case, this student is using his online self-presentation to resist how he is being positioned by others. His use of social media is concentrated on presenting aspects of his identity which may not be evident to his classmates, by employing impression management techniques to present to them the desired aspects of his identity.

6.4 Developing identities through social media engagement

The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire findings, as presented in Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece'), indicated that participants who reported using social media more often, agreed more strongly with the view that their social media practices relate to aspects of their identities. During the interviews, participants were invited to discuss how their use of social media relate to their sense of identity. Developing self-consciousness, receiving peer and emotional support, engaging in peer comparison practices, changing personal views on social issues, developing social skills and engaging in learning practices were identified through the qualitative analysis as the main ways in which social media practices relate to participants' identities.

6.4.1 "Why don't I look like that?": Developing self-consciousness

During the interviews, participants were asked about whether their engagement in social media practices has influenced aspects related to their sense of self. The analysis of participants' narratives indicated gender differences, as girls were more likely to report being influenced in various ways, unlike boys who explained that they don't get easily influenced by things they see on social media. As discussed by Student 15, boys focused more on aspects that were not related to his view of himself but to activities such as travelling abroad or starting a new sport:

> "I don't get influenced much by the things I see on social media. I don't get influenced about the things related to my everyday life, myself or my style, but for

> something more important I have been inspired, for example it has made me want to visit another country, to see something new. I don't believe that I get easily influenced because if I see that a friend of mine or a celebrity did something, I will reflect on it before letting it influence me and change the way I think. Firstly, I will see if what I saw is true and right, because on the internet there are so many opinions and you have to see if there is something right in it. Just because someone that I like did something, it doesn't mean that this is the right thing to do." (*Student 15, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

However, girls discussed several ways that their use of social media influenced their views of themselves, especially their self-consciousness regarding aspects of their physical appearance. Existing research has provided evidence that media play a crucial role in the development and sustenance of gender stereotypes which are also culturally constructed in the intersection with ethnicity and socio-economic status (Mazzarella. 2013; Rivera and Valvidia, 2013; Lemish and Götz, 2017).

In the present study, several girls reported that social media images of women's bodies and physical appearance had influenced their body image, usually in a negative way. Most girls described, as a positive influence, how viewing social media content has influenced them to change aspects of their personal style and physical appearance. However, they also described how they go through the process of comparing themselves to other girls (celebrities or friends) whom they see online and the ways that these comparisons lead to feelings of insecurity and negative body images. Most of the girls who referred to these practices also described how they change their lifestyle and everyday habits (diet, exercise) because, as they said, these images motivate them to try to 'look better':

> "I get inspired by the models I see on social media. They post their outfits and I want to dress just like them, I like to take photos of myself like they do. For example, I try to pose like they pose on photos, but I also see how they exercise and

> I want to exercise as well. It is not that there was something specific I saw which changed my way of thinking, but I get influenced a lot. I don't try to 'copy' something or to become somebody else's copy, but I want to do the things that they do, I want it so much. This is changing you, so I have changed myself through social media. I have seen things that I wouldn't have seen if I didn't use social media." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

> "Something negative is that on social media the female body is presented in a particular way. And for example, you might see things that are perfect and then I will think 'Why don't I look like that?'." (*Student 12, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "I like to post things but I prefer much more to see what other people are posting, I get inspired. For example, it gives you courage. I see posts from girls who are models or fitness models and it gives you courage. They have very nice things, they post very nice things." (*Student 8, Girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

These girls' narratives indicated that there are strong underlying messages in social media about how a girl should be, focusing strongly on aspects of physical appearance. Certain implicit gender stereotypes determine these practices, as described by one of the participants:

> "Being a girl myself, I might search for something that will help me look better, something that I wouldn't think on my own or to change something that I used to do and it didn't help me, something that will be positive for me to change." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

On the other hand, there were also some girls who described that through their use of social media they had discovered content about acceptance and body positivity which made them feel better about themselves:

> "There are several YouTubers who say for example that we should learn to love ourselves etc. and mainly this has made me think differently about myself." (*Student 14, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

However, most girls described the aforementioned pressures regarding their physical appearance, and the gender stereotypes about how a girl should look, which are being reproduced in social media. Previous studies on gender roles on social media have suggested that young people take over messages about stereotypical gender roles through society and traditional media, then play out stereotypical gender roles when they post sexy pictures of themselves on social media (Stokes, 2007; Manago et al., 2008; Siibak, 2010; Kapidzic and Herring, 2011; Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose, 2011; Tortajada, Araüna, and Martinez, 2013; Van Oosten et al., 2017).

Regarding the development of sexualised and stereotypical gender roles by young people, it has also been suggested that girls' understanding of femininity is tied to physical attractiveness (Zurbriggen et al., 2010; Liss et al., 2011; Van Oosten et al., 2017). This view of physical attractiveness as constitutive of femininity is reflected in the narratives of several girls in the present study. Although previous empirical data have suggested that online behaviour is guided by offline gender roles and sexual norms (Subrahmanyam et al., 2006; Doornwaard et al., 2014), the narratives discussed above indicate that girls' interaction with social media content may reinforce their views of femininity as tied to physical attractiveness. Nevertheless, the cases of participants who discussed discovering online content about acceptance and body positivity indicate that young people do not simply absorb online content but also resist dominant stereotypes.

6.4.2 "They can make you feel better": Peer and emotional support

Previous studies have discussed the fact that girls are more likely to use social media for relational purposes and emotional support (Swist et al., 2015). Similar findings were evident in the current study, as several girls reported using social media platforms either to

express their thoughts and feelings or to seek emotional and peer support. One of the participants, Student 6, reporting using her Facebook account to share her thoughts. She believed that this practice was useful to her because it enabled her self-expression and also because she thought that there might be other persons among her online audience who would relate to her. When asked why she prefers to express her thoughts through her social media accounts, she stressed that "if you say something like this orally, people won't pay so much attention, and you cannot say it to a lot of people to see it and understand it. But in social media anyone can see it and there will be more people who will pay attention to it". Therefore, to her, visibility and a larger audience are affordances of the online context which are important for the process of expressing herself freely, thus distinguishing it from the offline context.

Several girls also mentioned online content such as 'inspirational quotes', photographs and videos of other users who may share experiences, thoughts and feelings similar to their own, which are a source of emotional support. As explained by one of the students, the knowledge that there are other peers who have similar thoughts and feelings can be experienced as strong emotional support:

> "Many times, you see quotes or status and especially quotes can make you feel better about yourself. For example you may find a girl that feels the same way as you and you might feel better. But sometimes you can also feel worse because you see how many things other people have achieved and you see that you have done nothing." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

However, the same student also described how she can experience negative feelings by engaging in a process of comparisons between herself and other people online. The following section will focus on the process of peer comparison through online social media practices as this was discussed by some participants.

6.4.3 “Their life must be better”: Engaging in peer comparison practices

Several students reported engaging in peer comparisons through their use of social media, leading to the creation of negative feelings about themselves. In addition, it has been observed that these narratives were discussed by students from the most affluent social class backgrounds:

> “In social media I suppose that everyone is doing what I am doing, they post things only when something good is happening in their lives. By seeing what others are posting you think that their life must be better and sometimes you feel bad about yourself. Or you might say that this girl posted a very pretty photograph, she is very pretty and many times this makes you feel bad about yourself.” (*Student 27, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

> “Things that I see on social media has changed the way I see myself. For sure there are some role models which are presented through social media platforms. Anyone who logs in their social media accounts see things that they would like to have and they try to have them or to do the same things, but sometimes this is bringing you down because you feel that you don’t have these things and you feel that you must have these things or that you must become like them. You see things that are perfect, ideal, and you try to do the same, to be like that.” (*Student 41, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

Comparing themselves against peers on the basis of online content is a practice which is commonly observed among young people on social media platforms (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Peer comparison practices have been described as important for young people, even before the advent of social media platforms, because of the need of adolescents to belong to and be accepted by certain peer groups (Krayer et al., 2008). The proliferation of social media platforms enables the engagement in peer comparison practices in new ways (Chua and Chang, 2016). The findings of the present study further

support this view as several participants reported engaging in peer comparison practices on social media platforms.

Several previous studies have described engagement in peer comparison as a downside of social media use which may impact young people's self-esteem (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011; Kalpidou et al., 2011; Andreassen et al., 2012; Chou and Edge, 2012; Feinstein et al., 2013; Rutledge et al., 2013; Vogel et al., 2014). Although the participants of the present study expressed feeling pressured by their engagement in peer-comparison on social media platforms, further research would be needed in order to identify whether this impacts their well-being and self-esteem.

6.4.4 Conformity versus Diversity: "It made me think about these issues"

Many of the participants admitted that their use of social media contributed to changing their personal views on social issues. Some of the participants who admitted the impact of their engagement in social media platforms struggled to explain exactly in what ways this engagement had affected them. They emphasised that an important affordance of social media is the access that they provide to a huge amount of information and content which, as Student 8 explains, would not be possible solely through the offline context:

> "I get influenced so much by things I see on social media. I have changed myself a lot. I have seen things that I wouldn't have seen if I didn't use them." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

On the one hand, some of the students described how this access to a huge audience and vast amounts of information creates pressures to conform to what is popular or to what everyone else is doing. The following excerpts are indicative of how students experience this pressure to conform and how social media can cultivate social comparison practices which have a negative effect on users' self-esteem:

> "Nowadays, there are peers of mine that they like to go out to nightclubs and places like that. Personally, I don't like these places a lot, I like going out, visit places, walk around etc. and I also see other peers of mine posting things from clubs with loud music etc. and I sometimes am at home when I see these things and I realise that I am not having so much fun. It seems that they are having an amazing time and I realise that I don't have friendships like these. And this sometimes might make me feel that I am different in a good way but most of the times it makes me feel lonely and more isolated. And another thing is that I see a photo that someone else is posting and I want to get 'Likes' as well. This is a very important characteristic in social media because the more 'Likes' you get, the better you feel about yourself." (*Student 40, boy, Private School 2, Greek*)

The view that 'the more likes you get, the better you feel about yourself' was expressed by several participants, indicating how the technical affordances of social media platforms can contribute to the creation of a quantifiable and 'objectified' notion of social approval and peer recognition. This objectified perspective is also evident in the following extract, in which a student described how he might change his personal viewpoints according to what is popular, implying that the right viewpoint is the most popular one:

> "I see some quotes on Facebook and on Instagram that make me wonder and reflect about things. I might reflect then on my views and I might change my viewpoint, something that I was wrong about. For example, about how people think, how they act, how they treat other people, this might change according to what I see on social media, according to what is popular." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

On the other hand, contrary to views which emphasise how the use of social media encourages social conformity, some participants described how their use contributed to a greater acceptance of social diversity:

> "There is so much information that you can receive, both positive and negative, that make you think differently about so many things. Of course, it may have also influenced the way you understand yourself, but I think that it mainly influences how you see others. I think for example that after social media our relationship towards the gay community and to people from different countries has got better." (*Student 26, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

> "Social media has changed my views about some issues but in a positive way. I see the opinions of other people about discriminations that exist now and I might change my viewpoint about these issues. One example is about gay couples. Many times, gay couples get criticised these days but now, and according to what we see online, gay couples, celebrities who are gay, they can change our viewpoints about being gay." (*Student 28, boy, Private School 1, Greek*)

Both students emphasised the ways that the variety of content distributed through social media platforms has contributed to greater acceptance of diversity. The importance of viewing content from other countries and places in the world, as well as having access to online discussions where one can encounter a variety of different viewpoints, has been highlighted by many participants as important benefits of social media which contribute to cultivating diversity and acceptance of social differences. Hence, it can be argued that, based on the differences in the ways that participants discussed online content, they do not simply 'absorb' content that defines their identities but instead, they engage in a complex process of negotiating with online and offline content. As Hall (1996: 4) argues, identity is 'constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions'.

Increased awareness about a variety of social issues relevant to the Greek but also the global context was reported by several participants. Participants mentioned viewing videos and reading articles about various social issues, such as social justice, inequalities, social

diversity, consumerism and environmental issues. Many of them explained that they became more interested in and aware of social and political issues through their use of social media and they described how, by using social media platforms, they can get informed about content that they would not search for on their own. Some participants argued that the format of the online content found on social media is user-friendly (videos for example are short, easy to understand and to watch) and complex issues may be presented in a way that is more interesting to them, which is another reason why they became more interested in social issues.

> "Lately I like to watch videos about diversity and equality among people and I have watched so many videos about these issues. There are also some 3-minute videos on Buzzfeed that are short but talk about various issues like these. I also watch many TedX videos about various issues. I am very interested in social issues, I was not like this before using social media. I didn't know about these things before." (*Student 12, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "I watched a video about how they process meat to produce ham and how the mass meat production is functioning, and it showed all about animal suffering, how they kill them and how they feed them and this video made me reflect about whether it is good to consume these products. However, I didn't change my eating habits, but it made me think about these issues. And on Facebook you might see things, about political and social issues and read about them, issues that you wouldn't think to search for on your own." (*Student 15, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

However, several participants noted that this interest in social issues did not necessary lead to an engagement in political action.

6.4.5 “You socialise more”: Developing social skills

The process of socialising with their peers was described as important for young people and several of the participants argued that their use of social media has enabled them to further develop their social skills, which they transferred to their offline interactions as well. Some of them explained that social media helped them expand their social networks, as they could ‘stay in touch’ with more people and acquaintances apart from their close friends.

One of the participants referred to developing more advanced social skills which were then transferred to his socialising practices offline, again highlighting the fuzzy boundaries between the ‘offline’ and ‘online’ worlds. To him, communicating through social media led to the development of greater confidence in approaching people in both online and offline contexts. As he explained, the openness which is created through the affordances of social media platforms helped him to become more open towards others both online and offline and this change led to an expansion of his social network.

> “Basically, by using social media you socialise more, and personally this has helped me a lot. I made more friends, I learnt more things and I started talking to various people. In general, I became more open towards people. Then I became more open towards these people offline as well, I talked more and I learnt to express myself more easily, more freely.” (*Student 9, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

As explained in the above extract, social media can be experienced as a more open and free space in which students who feel more introverted can connect with others, and this online communication could provide a sense of confidence, enabling the person to approach people more freely in offline contexts as well.

Apart from developing social skills, there were also some participants who explained how popularity on social media platforms may contribute to increased popularity offline. However, the notion of popularity was based on how many 'likes' you get or how many 'friends' you have on your online accounts. One of the participants reported using his popularity on social media to compensate for rejections which he experienced offline, and being more popular offline:

> "Through Facebook I gained more reputation. I am very engaged on Facebook and in general I have a lot of impact there and I see that this has an effect on my relationships as well. People take Facebook very seriously. For example, maybe someone has rejected you in the past and then he might add you on Facebook and he sees that you have so many 'Likes' and you have such a big impact and then the next week he is totally different towards you. Personally, this doesn't bother me. Everyone can do whatever he wants. I just see that my reputation is growing and that I have more friends." (*Student 17, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

The case of this student highlights how the online context is used to navigate offline relationships. This is another case where the student is using his online self-presentation to resist his positioning by others (a similar case was presented in Section 6.3.2). In addition, his narrative about the impact of receiving 'likes', which provides a sense of social validation, reflects an objectified and quantifiable sense of identity through his use of social media platforms (Gardner and Davis, 2014).

6.4.6 "We learn things that the school doesn't teach us": Out-of-school learning

Almost all participants acknowledged that 'they have learnt many things' through social media. However, when asked to explain more explicitly what they have learnt, they used generic descriptions such as 'learning about the world in general', 'learning about what is happening' and 'learning things that are relevant to you'. Many participants focused on learning about certain sports and artistic activities (drawing, sketching, photography)

through social media or developing their skills in such activities by discovering relevant content on social media or participating in interest-related online groups. Some of the participants referred to technical skills which they learnt through watching 'DIY' videos and a smaller number of students referred to watching TedX videos from which they learn about science issues which are not part of the school curriculum or are not taught at school.

All participants emphasised the differences between learning that happens at school and learning through social media, highlighting the diversity of learning sources and viewpoints available on social media by contrast with school. In addition, they emphasised the ability to choose the learning sources and the content they prefer, but they also appreciate the ability to learn from their friends' interests, as this leads them to new discoveries and an expansion of their interests. Learning by being part of a network, selecting content to view according to their personal interests and experiences, along with the diversity of online content, were the main reasons why learning from social media is different, according to students:

> "I have learnt so many things through social media, things that the school doesn't teach us because maybe they think that they are not relevant, maybe they don't care. So social media help you to learn various things that are relevant to you or that maybe you haven't realised that there were things that they would be relevant to you." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

School, family and social media platforms were referred to as the main contexts where learning happens. However, participants distinguished between, on the one hand, learning that happens through social media as a context which is more open to diverse viewpoints and the discovery of content relevant to them, and on the other hand, learning that happens in the school or family context. Moreover, some students expressed the view that learning through social media can be more 'authentic' because social media platforms provide a

more accurate representation of what is happening in the world, 'what is true' and 'how people and relationships are' by contrast with school or family:

> "Apart from school and family where we learn several things, a better way to learn about the world is through social media because it shows a different viewpoint. Things on social media are not shown according to what school or family believe; they show things from a more neutral viewpoint." (*Student 28, boy, Private School 1, Greek*)

> "I believe that through social media you learn about people, how people are and you learn about reality in there. You learn how reality is." (*Student 42, girl, Evening School, Greek*)

As discussed previously in Section 6.2.4, one of the main issues in relying on social media for information is exposure to 'fake news' (Spratt and Agosto, 2017). The views expressed by Students 28 and 42 support previous evidence that young people tend to gravitate towards 'opiniated' news sources (Marchi, 2012). This tendency, and the view of social media platforms as purely authentic and neutral sources of information, carry the risk of users' consuming online content without having the required level of criticality.

Finally, the only direct link identified between social media platforms and the school context were the online groups which all participants reported joining along with their classmates. As they explained, these groups are used to discuss issues related to their school subjects and assignments or other common school activities.

6.5 Participants' views of their social media engagement

During the interviews, participants were also invited to discuss their views on the positive and negative aspects of their engagement with social media platforms. Among the positive aspects, participants mentioned the sense of freedom, the ease of communication, whereas hateful content, over-exposing personal information and privacy concerns were described

as the negative aspects of social media. The following sections will present and analyse participants' views on these issues.

6.5.1 Young people's views of the positive aspects of their social media practices

Most participants explained that the ease of communication and the informative character of social media platforms were among the most positive aspects of these platforms. However, several participants emphasised the sense of freedom and personal agency which are cultivated by particular affordances of social media platforms (boyd, 2014) such as anonymity (ability to avoid identification by others), visibility (ability to see and be seen) and audiences.

The sense of freedom provided through social media platforms was reported by many participants as one of the most positive aspects of their engagement in these platforms. This sense of freedom was related to freedom of self-expression; for example, "They don't have restrictions. Anyone can use them, in any way they want, whenever they want." (*Student 22, girl, State School 3, Greek*). For several participants this sense of freedom was linked mostly to platforms such as Tumblr and Wattpad in which profiles usually do not provide personal information, so that participants appreciated them as spaces for self-expression combined with the absence of personal criticism:

> "What I enjoy the most is that I get lost in there but I feel that I can be myself without someone criticising me or without me caring about what other people might say about me. That I can do things which I cannot do in my everyday life and I feel more carefree." (*Student 6, girl, State School 1, Greek/Albanian*)

> "I like that you can choose to post whatever you want, whatever you feel that expresses you. And especially in platforms such as Tumblr where nobody can criticise you. Everyone can post whatever they want." (*Student 18, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

This feeling of freedom was also linked to the sense of personal agency that participants gain through their use of social media. Choosing what you prefer to see on these platforms as well as choosing the ways that you prefer to communicate, having multimodal ways to express yourself, being able to participate in public discussions and access the different audiences created, were described by many participants as positive characteristics of their use of social media. Especially for participants who reported engaging in creative practices, accessing wider audiences was crucial to their engagement:

> "I like that it is a big circle, that you can talk with people from everywhere and you can show something you have done in the whole world and you can receive back their opinions. If it is something good, you will be very happy, it can make you feel much better psychologically." (*Student 26, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

6.5.2 Young people's views on the negative aspects of their social media practices

This sense of freedom was simultaneously described as a negative aspect of social media platforms, which can be used to cultivate negative practices such as curation of hateful or inappropriate content and online bullying. Several students reported seeing hateful and racist comments on social media platforms. Contrary to previous narratives about the absence of criticism, some students reported that on social media platforms people can be strongly criticised by others:

> "Some people let out their emotions on social media and to me this is wrong. I don't believe it is right to come down on somebody. It is not right at all, actually I don't like it." (*Student 11, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "I don't like that there are people who are not open-minded and they don't accept any new information. They are very negative and they just criticise." (*Student 26, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

Although participants discussed hateful speech as one of the negative aspects of using social media, they did not mention any personal incidence of receiving hateful comments, but many of them reported seeing hateful comments on content curated online by others. When asked how they react to hateful content, most participants reported that they try to ignore it although they admitted that they feel upset when they encounter hateful content online. Previous studies about young people's responses to negative online experiences have referred to coping strategies such as blocking online accounts of people who use hateful speech, changing privacy settings, ceasing to use certain platforms, and discussing these issues with people offline (Lilley et al., 2014). Some participants in the present study also referred to 'unfollowing' online accounts which may contain hateful content, but because they did not report receiving any hateful comments on their personal profiles they did not go on to discuss any other coping strategies.

Moreover, several participants discussed the negative aspects of social media platforms as stemming not from the platforms themselves but from the ways that people choose to use them. Being addicted to social media platforms, over-exposing personal information, and using social media to show off were the main attitudes which were described negatively:

> "There are many of my peers who have become addicted and they post too often and they also post too much personal information which is unnecessary. They are addicted to it, to post everything, their feelings, everything." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

> "I don't like when someone is showing off through their social media. For example, you see a girl who posts photos of herself, showing off her body, being provocative just to get more 'Likes', this is not nice. To do things like that just to get some more 'Likes'." (*Student 11, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "I don't like the amount of personal information that we expose about ourselves and how someone may know things about us that we don't even know, just because of an online profile that we have and how there are persons who post all the time about where they are and about what they think about certain things. I believe that you shouldn't expose these things in public." (*Student 15, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

The excerpts above also illustrate young people's online privacy concerns. Although many students discussed these, their narratives focused solely on the risk of over-sharing personal information in an online space. Participants demonstrated limited knowledge of how online platforms use users' data, and failed to acknowledge the corporate nature of online platforms. The recent revelations around Cambridge Analytica and Facebook have highlighted the need for a response from researchers and educators and the need to problematise learning in the age of data 'acquisition' (Potter, 2018). An issue of major importance, in the contemporary context, is the collection of huge datasets from children, who usually cannot understand what is happening, neither do their carers (Williamson, 2017). The findings of the present study also underline the need for responding to these challenges faced by children and young people in the digital age.

6.6 The importance of the 'social' in the use of social media: Insights from the qualitative analysis

The following sections will provide a discussion of the ways in which young people's online social media practices relate to their identities (RQ2), as well as of the ways that social media practices are influenced by participants' social locations (RQ4) based on the qualitative findings of the present study.

6.6.1 Social media practices in relation to identities

Social media use by children and young people is characterised by technical, material, social and motivational dimensions (Swist et al., 2015). The findings of the qualitative

phase provide rich information about the social and motivational dimensions of social media use by young people in Athens. The following table provides an overview of the types of social media practices reported by the participants in this study along with the drivers of these practices:

Table 6.2: Types of social media practices reported by interview participants

SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES	PURPOSE/MOTIVATION
Instant Messaging Joining Online Groups	Communication
Joining Online Groups Planning 'Meet-ups' through Online Communities	Socialising
Following accounts/pages Browsing content Joining Online Groups	Supporting/Expanding Interests
Posting photographs Posting status Checking-in	Identity Performance
Posting photographs/videos Video-making Writing stories	Creative Expression
Watching videos Listening to music Reading stories	Entertainment
Following news accounts/pages Browsing/Sharing news content Reading articles	Information Seeking

Participants reported diverse experiences regarding their social media practices. Some participants expressed the view that their use of social media served mainly communicational purposes, whereas several participants discussed varied ways in which their practices relate to socialising, personal interests, creative expression and informational uses.

Students who reported that their use of social media was mainly focused on solely communicational purposes provided very limited information about their online experiences because they emphasised communication with friends as their most important online activity. Nevertheless, many participants who reported engaging in more varied

social media practices, discussed diverse ways in which their practices relate to their identities. For these participants, social media platforms were presented as important spaces for connecting with friends and acquaintances, for creative work and self-expression, and for getting informed. These findings are in accordance with previous studies showing that social media platforms are used by young people as a mechanism for both expression and connection (Green et al., 2011).

The aforementioned underlying motivations relate closely to young people's identities. For most participants, online practices are experienced and understood as part of their everyday social practices, because their online networks are linked with their offline environments. Social media constitute a space where they navigate relationships and express themselves, thus relating directly to their everyday experiences which contribute to the shaping of their identities. Although social media are experienced as interlinked with the offline context in which participants grow up, young people highlight certain online affordances which enable some online practices. Autonomy, privacy, audiences, freedom, visibility and recognition are online affordances which motivate young people to use social media platforms (boyd, 2014).

These affordances frame the practices but also the experiences of young people on social media platforms. Visibility enables participants 'to see' and 'to be seen' (boyd, 2014). Several participants reported that their sense of identity is related to visibility in social media. For some, visibility was related to positive experiences of peer and emotional support (seeing inspirational/motivational posts, peers who share similar experiences), whereas for others it was linked to negative experiences of peer comparison practices. Visibility was linked by some participants to social conformity narratives, whereas for others it was linked to promoting social diversity. In addition, participants' narratives about the ways in which their practices are differentiated across different platforms and different

networks indicate that online experiences are individual, contextual and situational (Swist et al., 2015).

Having (and choosing) an audience is a crucial affordance which can cultivate engagement in creative practices by young people. Regarding creative expression, freedom provided by anonymity online was an important reason for several participants to express their creativity and share their creative work without being afraid of criticism. The sense of belonging and being part of a community was another important social media affordance. Students who reported engaging in meaningful creative expression practices through their participation in social media platforms such as Wattpad and Amino reflected what Jenkins et al. (2016) described as 'participatory culture'. This 'participatory culture' is characterised by support for engaging in creative practices and sharing creative products, involving a type of informal mentorship and a sense of social connection with others (Jenkins et al., 2016). This participation was presented as a driver of students' creative expression.

Having an audience and being seen was also related to online practices such as receiving 'likes' or 'views' which provide a sense of social validation. For some participants this sense of social validation was highly important and contributed to the development of an objectified sense of identity, as 'the more likes you get, the better you feel about yourself'. This finding supports Gardner and Davis's (2014) argument about the quantifiable values which can be assigned to identity through social media platforms. In this sense, identity is becoming more externally oriented and quantifiable.

Furthermore, the maintenance or even expansion of personal networks through social media platforms was crucial to all participants. Previous studies have also discussed how participation in social networks is positively associated with higher levels of bridging and bonding social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008; Steinfield et al., 2009; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Ahn, 2012). In this study, peer activities such as providing

feedback and emotional support as well as sharing common norms and networks through social media platforms were recognised as important practices related to participants' identities. Several participants discussed how social media enable them to maintain and expand communication with acquaintances and people outside their closed group of friends.

Furthermore, almost all participants identified elements of learning through their use of social media, mainly related either to creative practices (e.g. drawing skills) or to informational practices. Although all participants described informational practices on social media, and the majority of them highlighted that social media constituted their main or only source of getting informed, only a small number of participants discussed critically the affordances of these platforms. News on social media platforms was understood as more objective and social media platforms were understood as neutral, with no acknowledgement of the corporate nature of online platforms. This omission indicates that participants had little or no understanding of how these platforms work and how news items are curated online. Since social media platforms are the main source of information, the need for critical media literacy, which focuses not only on understanding the online content but also on how this content appears on the news feed and how these technical systems work, is essential. The need for media literacy is not only relevant for young people but also for adults because in order to be critical people should be aware of how media are produced (Jenkins et al., 2016).

6.6.2 Social media practices in relation to participants' social locations: Insights from the qualitative analysis

Through the questionnaire analysis in Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece'), several differences have been identified regarding the engagement in social media practices and the characteristics of participants' social locations. Gender, type of school, *ethnikotita* and parental educational level are the characteristics of participants'

social locations which were discussed in the quantitative analysis. The analysis of the interviews contributes to a deeper understanding of how different practices relate to participants' social locations (gender, *ethnikotita*, type of school, parental education).

The quantitative findings indicated that girls are more engaged in social media platforms than boys: they use a broader range of platforms, connect more frequently and are likely to engage in more types of social media practices. Through the interviews it was identified that girls are more likely to engage in self-presentation practices. All participants who discussed how their use of social media influences their body image were girls; therefore, it can be assumed that certain gender stereotypes are being reproduced through social media platforms. In addition, relational uses of social media platforms (seeking emotional support, giving relationships advice) were discussed by girls who described how content on social media can provide emotional support.

Social media platforms can be seen as spaces providing both risks and opportunities for the development of a gendered identity (Ringrose and Barajas, 2011). In feminist media studies it has been suggested that contemporary media contexts have provided the opportunity for girls to participate in digital contexts more than in the past, but they have also created the risk of sexual objectification which characterises the post-feminist media contexts (Gill, 2008, 2011). In this study, girls' narratives about their body image indicate how stereotypes of femininity are being reproduced through their use of social media platforms creating risks of developing a negative body image. On the other hand, narratives about discovering online content regarding acceptance and body positivity indicate that not all girls simply absorb online content but that they also resist dominant stereotypes. In addition, girls' narratives about engaging in creative practices and participatory online communities indicate how social media engagement provides opportunities for cultivating a creative identity.

The questionnaire findings indicated that students who attended evening/vocational schools were less likely to engage in many social media practices, except for playing games online, and were also less likely to report engaging in educational uses. These differences were also evident from participants' narratives during the interviews. All four participants from evening schools discussed very limited uses of their social media platforms. When they were asked to talk about their social media practices they mostly discussed viewing what others posted and playing games. These practices indicated that they were using social media platforms solely as content consumers, without engaging or participating actively in communicative or creative practices. Except for one of the participants who explained how he used Facebook to find more information to support his interest in kick-boxing, all participants mentioned very limited practices (described as 'just talking sometimes with friends') and viewing content posted by their friends. In contrast, students from state and private schools reported more varied uses of social media platforms (participating in group chats, posting photos, joining online groups, following interest-related accounts, sharing links and articles, etc.) and explained how their online practices were linked in various ways with their offline contexts and were differentiated across different platforms.

Educational and informational uses of social media platforms were associated with the level of parental education. The mix in participants' parental educational background makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions about the ways that it relates to certain social media practices. However, participants who discussed educational uses of social media (such as watching videos about scientific issues, Tedx videos etc.) were characterised by high parental educational level. In addition, participants from the evening school (who reported the lowest parental educational level) were the only participants who did not discuss using social media platforms for informational purposes.

Questionnaire findings indicated that non-Greek participants were more likely to report using Twitter and were also less likely to engage in educational uses of social media platforms. The qualitative analysis of the narratives of non-Greek participants showed that all non-Greek participants reported an intensive use of social media platforms which was mainly focused on enabling social connections. Although only four interview participants were non-Greek, all of them discussed an intense use of social media and described various practices in which they engaged in order to expand their social networks. Participant 5, a Filipino girl, participated actively in fan groups on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and attended meet-ups with other members of these groups. Participant 6, a Greek-Albanian girl, participated actively in Wattpad, where she explained that anonymity helped her to be her true self and how she appreciated deeply the communication with people that were not part of her offline social network. Participant 9, an Albanian girl, also discussed how her use of social media had helped her to 'become more sociable'. These narratives indicate the common need to socialise and the use of social media to expand offline relationships.

Since research on social media practices and young people is still expanding, there is a need to concentrate more on the variations of users' practices and the extent, range and types of networks in which they engage (Burnett and Merchant, 2011). The findings of the present study indicate that young people's social location influences their social media practices and their identity development within them. Opinions rooted in technological determinism fail to recognise the importance of the social context in which technology and online practices are situated (boyd, 2014). Therefore, these findings further support this argument by recognising the importance of the social context in which young people engage with social media platforms and the complexity of this engagement.

Recent discussions about the 'digital divide' have shifted the focus from who has access to new technologies and online platforms to who has the knowledge to use these technologies to participate in social practices and to improve their personal and social lives (Barron,

2004; Jenkins, 2009; Hargittai and Kim, 2012; Park and Lee, 2015). Issues of gender, ethnicity and social class intersect and therefore drawing clear conclusions about certain groups is challenging (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). However, the aforementioned findings indicate that social location characteristics frame young people's online social media practices, without, however, determining these practices.

CHAPTER 7: Developing aspirations

This chapter will focus on the qualitative analysis of young people's future aspirations and their relationship to social media practices. The questionnaire findings in Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece') indicated that the vast majority of students intend to enter Higher Education after graduating from high school. In addition, according to the questionnaire analysis, more than half of the students admitted that their engagement in social media has made them reflect on their aspirations. In the quantitative analysis, gender, type of school and parental educational level have been significantly associated with the use of social media as a source of influence on future aspirations. More specifically, girls, students attending private schools and students whose parents are highly educated were more likely to report that they were inspired by social media regarding their future aspirations. In this chapter, the interview analysis will provide a detailed analysis of the types of aspirations discussed by the participants in this study and the factors which influence these aspirations. It will also provide an understanding of how social media practices influence young people's future educational and career aspirations (RQ3). Finally, the qualitative analysis will discuss how young people's social locations (gender, type of school, parental educational level, *ethnikotita*) relate to the development of future aspirations and their sources of influence.

7.1 What are the future educational and career aspirations of young people in Athens?

7.1.1 Continuing to Higher Education: A common goal, different narratives

The questionnaire findings have indicated that most students plan to continue their studies at Higher Education level (81.5%=Very True, 10.2%=A bit True), whereas only 8.3% reported that this is 'Not True'. However, not all students have decided on the career that they would like to pursue (51.2%=Very True, 33.4%=A bit True, 15.4%=Not True). The questionnaire did not involve additional questions regarding participants' aspirations;

therefore, the interview phase was designed to investigate further the types of future aspirations and the factors which influence their development. As presented in Section 6.1 of Chapter 6 ('Developing identities'), 45 students in total (from six different schools) participated in the interview phase of this study (see Appendix V for a table of participants' details).

During the interviews, participants were asked about their future plans after finishing school. Regarding this aspect, the interviews revealed a pattern similar to that of the quantitative findings. Most interview participants expressed their intention to enter higher education. In total, 40 out of 45 participants mentioned that they would like to access university. Among the total sample, just two participants (Student 5 and Student 14) were uncertain about their future plans. Student 5 (*girl, State School 1, Filipino*) reported that although she likes photography, she is not sure about her plans after high school, whereas Student 14 (*girl, Greek, State School 3*) was determined to enter university and also complete a postgraduate degree but had not made a decision regarding the subject.

Only two students (Student 43 – *boy, Evening School, Greek*; Student 44 – *boy, Evening School, Greek*) reported that they were planning to apply for a semi-skilled/unskilled manual job, while another two students (Student 13 – *girl, State School 2, Greek*; Student 45 – *boy, Evening School, Greek*) reported that they were planning to attend a Vocational College (I.E.K./Private Vocational College) to gain a vocational qualification. Both participants who reported that they were aiming at semi-skilled/unskilled manual jobs, as well as one of the participants who planned to attend a vocational college, were attending evening school.

Since all four participants who did not aim to enter university were attending evening school and came from a working-class background (see Appendix V for parental occupation and educational level information), it can be assumed that family background has played a crucial role in shaping their aspirations to enter Higher Education. These

findings further support previous research evidence in the Greek context which has highlighted the fundamental role of family background in facilitating access to Higher Education through the mobilisation of economic, cultural and social resources (Benincasa, 1998; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2008; Vryonides and Gouvias, 2012).

Both quantitative and qualitative findings of the present study illustrate the claim that students develop 'high' educational aspirations, as most students reported that they plan to continue their studies in Higher Education. These findings support the view that higher education is still highly valued in Greek society, where around 25% of the Greek population hold a Bachelor's degree whereas the OECD mean is 16% (OECD, 2018). According to the same OECD (2018) report, despite high rates of Bachelor's degrees holders, Greece has a graduate employment rate lower than those of most European countries.

In the present study, many participants who have decided on their field of study at university stated that they felt quite unsure about their employment options after graduating. As described in Chapter 2 ('Conducting research in the Greek context') austerity policies have had a great impact on young people's job opportunities and working conditions. Therefore, this uncertainty expressed by young people indicates that the process of developing future aspirations is becoming a complex task in this context (Section 7.1.2 will provide an in-depth analysis of participants' narratives in order to discuss these underlying issues further).

Among the 40 participants (out of 45) who reported that they intend to pursue their studies in Higher Education, various fields of study were mentioned. Most participants had already identified a field, also mentioning some alternative options. The following table presents the fields of study reported by the 40 participants who plan go to university (Student 5 and Student 14, who were uncertain about their future plans, are not included in the table):

Table 7.1: Participants' educational aspirations

FIELDS OF STUDY[68]	**PARTICIPANTS**	**GENDER**		**TYPE OF SCHOOL**			***ETHNIKOTITA***	
		BOYS	*GIRLS*	*STATE*	*PRIVATE*	*EVENING*	*GREEK*	*OTHER*
Medicine	6	2	4	4	2	-	4	2
Finance	5	2	3	5	-	-	4	1
Psychology	5	-	5	4	1	-	4	1
Architecture	3	-	3	1	2	-	3	-
Greek/English Literature	3	1	2	2	1	-	3	
Business/Marketing	2	-	2	-	2	-	2	-
Education	2	-	2	-	2	-	2	-
Computing	2	2	-	-	2	-	2	-
Law	2	-	2	1	1	-	2	-
Arts/Design	2	1	1	-	2	-	2	-
Physics	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	-
History	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	-
Biology	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Nutrition	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	-
Nursing	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	-
Sociology	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	-

[68] The table does not include multiple aspirations by the same participant. It includes the first option of studies mentioned by each participant.

As can be observed, Medicine is the most popular area of studies among participants. Previous studies in the Greek context have identified similar findings, suggesting that adolescents in Greece tend to develop high aspirations which involve studying at a Higher Education Institution, especially at the 'high-status' professional schools of Medicine, Law and Engineering (Gouvias and Vitsilakis-Soroniatis, 2005). Schools of Medicine and Law have traditionally been considered prestigious in the Greek context and therefore have been popular among students (Livanos, 2010).

In the present study, Law has not been identified among students' top choices. Architecture in Greece is a faculty which belongs to the same Polytechnic Department as the faculty of Engineering. In total, four students in this study reported aiming to study at a Polytechnic Department (3 in Architecture and one in Engineering), whereas studies in Finance and Psychology have been selected by several participants. In addition, students' subject preferences indicate the existence of some gendered patterns. As illustrated in Table 7.1, areas of study such as Psychology and Education are chosen only by girls, whereas Computing is only mentioned by boys. Medicine, Finance and Psychology are more popular among students from state schools and among non-Greek participants, whereas students from private schools referred to a more heterogeneous set of choices.

The gendered pattern regarding the choice of area of study, has also been noted in previous studies which argued that girls are more likely to aspire to careers that make a positive impact on the wider community (Skelton and Francis, 2009; Hoskins, 2017). This motivation of 'making a difference' may explain the gendered pattern of girls choosing fields such as Psychology and Education. This gendered pattern may reflect the impact of femininity on some girls who construct themselves as caring and selfless (Walkerdine et al., 2001; Skelton and Francis, 2009). In addition, although both boys and girls reported choosing varied fields of study, there was also evidence of gender-typical choices, since none of the boys chose a field related to care. While previous studies have supported the

view that boys remain more gender stereotyped in their careers than girls (Helwig, 1998; Francis 2000), in the present study both boys and girls expressed some gender-typical career aspirations.

To further understand the choices which were reported by the participants attending different types of schools, it is useful to focus on the themes which emerged in their narratives during the interviews, as presented in Sections 7.1.2 and 7.1.3.

7.1.2 "You have to go to university if you want to get a good job": The extrinsic values of Higher Education

Although all 40 participants who expressed the will to go to university shared a common goal, they drew on different narratives to justify their intentions. Most participants constructed university as a pre-requisite to pursuing a professional career. As mentioned above, only one participant (*Student 14, girl, State School 3, Greek*) was completely unsure about her field of studies (a potential reason for this uncertainty could be her age, since she was 15 years old and attending the first year of high school). However, like the large majority of participants, she was determined to go to university. The following quote is indicative of participants' construction of university as a pre-requisite to pursuit of a professional career:

> "It is certain that I will go to university because I believe it is required if you want to get a good job but also what I like to do requires to study at university. I want to study Physics or Computer Design. If I get into a Physics Department I will become a Physicist and I probably will specialise in something, but I cannot know this in advance." (*Student 1, boy, State School 1, Greek*)

Among students attending state schools, several mentioned aspiring primarily to the extrinsic rewards of attending university, with an emphasis on earning money and securing

a stable job. However, most of them appeared unsure as to how they will use their Bachelor's degree to achieve this:

> "I would like to get into studying Finance, so I will choose the Finance courses at school and then take the exams, but I am not sure what exactly I am going to do after studying. I am searching, I listen to what people around me say. I see through social media what may be more useful, something that might offer me more money to make my dreams come true." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

This narrative about searching for stability has been also identified in Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides's study (2011), where it was observed that social class influences students' choice of Higher Education studies. In that study it was found that students from less affluent social class backgrounds (lower-middle class and working-class) appeared to choose studies which would lead to permanent employment (for example, as school teacher), even if they demonstrate a high performance at school which would enable them to choose from a larger range of possibilities.

In the present study, several participants expressed their uncertainty as to how gaining a Higher Education degree would improve their employment options. The following quote reflects this uncertainty and the decline in the importance of obtaining a degree in the preferred field of study:

> "Firstly, I would like to say that almost all students take the Panhellenic exams[69]. However, I believe that there are very few students who will in fact work on what they have studied. I believe they are very few. That's why I am not stressed about not doing well in the Panhellenic exams. I am setting a very high goal, I want to study Psychology in a nice university but even if I go to another one I don't mind, it will not bother me." (*Student 20, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

[69] Panhellenic exams: University entry exams which are conducted during the last year of high school on a national level by the end of the last year of high school.

Although attending an undergraduate program in a Greek university does not require payment of tuition fees because it is state-funded, some participants from state schools mentioned that they aimed to choose only universities based in Athens, to avoid housing costs. Student 8 referred to the need to work during her studies and explained that she is planning to work in order to be financially independent:

> "OK, this is a dream, but I would like to get into Medicine or if I cannot make it I would like to get into Paramedical studies because I like Biology in general. I like many things and I engage with various things in my spare time. For example I like to do nails, so in case I don't get make it to university I would like to engage with something like that. I would like to study Medicine, but I would also like to engage with other activities. To participate in other programmes like volunteering, drawing. I surely want to engage with more things and to work at the same time. I don't want just to go to university. I want to work at the same time, a simple job, I just want to have my own money. I want to be somewhat independent." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

In addition, the only student from an evening school (among the four who participated in the interview phase) who reported that she would like to study at a university also referred to her need to continue undertaking paid work while studying:

> "I am quite young, I am 15 years old and I have already been working several years, doing different jobs. I have worked at a cafeteria, at a pastry shop, at a promotion company, I have been giving flyers on the streets. I think that when I finish school here, I haven't failed any year here, I would like to go to the vocational high school to take the Panhellenic exams. I want to go to university and become a nurse. Basically, I am thinking to become a nurse because a doctor, and generally someone who works at a hospital, is never left without money, they are essential. The hospital will always operate, you will never be left unemployed, you

> will always have a job. That's the dream." (*Student 42, girl, Evening School, Greek*)

Interestingly, her choice of profession is guided by minimising risk and although she is planning to enter higher education, she is considering which choice would be less risky. This narrative supports the argument that participation in higher education is constructed as an inherently less risky and uncertain choice for middle-class than for working-class students (Archer and Huchings, 2000; Archer et al., 2003). We will return to this theme throughout the subsequent sections. Not surprisingly, both students who reported the need to work during their studies came from more disadvantaged social class backgrounds. Student 8 is an Albanian girl attending a state school, whose father is a construction worker and whose mother is unemployed, both having a low educational level. Student 42 is a Greek girl attending an evening school, whose father works as a shopping assistant at a grocery shop and whose mother is unemployed, both, again, having a low educational level. Both students expressed 'high' aspirations, wishing to study Medicine and Nursing respectively.

However, as can be observed from their narratives, attending university is not feasible unless they are also employed. This is in sharp contrast with the narratives of the more middle-class students in the sample. Although both came from a less affluent background, they both developed high aspirations. Previous studies of students' aspirations have indicated that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to report high aspirations (Croll, 2008; Strand and Winston, 2008; Kintrea et al., 2011; Archer et al., 2014). In the Greek context, aspiring to continue studying in Higher Education has been historically very popular because of the strong belief that education will provide the opportunity for upward social mobility (Tsoukalas, 1977; Lambiri-Dimaki, 1983; Frangoudaki, 1985; Kyridis, 2003; Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides, 2011).

Nevertheless, it has also been argued that students from less affluent backgrounds are less likely to actually achieve social mobility despite aiming high (Archer et al., 2014). Students 8 and 42 appear to develop their high aspirations along with an internalised sense that maybe these aspirations are just 'dreams'. In their narratives above, they referred to their aspirations to study as 'dreams' and not as concrete future plans. The perception of 'going to university' as 'a dream' and not as an automatic assumption (as expressed by students from more affluent backgrounds) can be understood as framed by students' relationship with their social context. These perceptions may be explained by employing Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990, 1992) which is shaped by students' social location and can frame how they understand and engage with the social world (Reay, 2017, 2004, 2000). Reay, David and Ball (2005) have discussed how classed and racialised habitus shapes students' perceptions of entering university as either taken for granted or as an option which is not for people like them.

As will be discussed in the following section, this narrative is in stark contrast with the narratives of students who attend private schools and come from more affluent backgrounds. These students discussed their future aspirations as obvious by referring to strategic choices which are part of a detailed career plan which they can imagine themselves enacting in the future.

7.1.3 University choice as part of further career planning

Contrary to the narratives above which constructed 'going to university' as a prerequisite to securing a job, the narratives of students who attended private schools focused on the construction of 'going to university' as a step towards a detailed career plan for their future. Most participants who were attending private schools presented a clearer and more detailed plan around their future aspirations, mentioning specific universities in Greece and abroad, as well as areas of postgraduate studies which they aim to pursue. In addition, they discussed their choice of going to university without referring to the extrinsic values of

entering Higher Education in the future, but instead used a discourse of 'personal interest' and emphasised how their choice of studies relates to their life experiences, thus constructing themselves as agentic subjects of their choices.

For example, in the following quote, Student 38 (*girl, Private School 2, Greek*) discussed her intention to study Marketing:

> "Regarding Marketing and Business studies, I was dreaming since I was little that I am working in this field where you are sitting in a big round table and you are presenting things. I have always been very good in communication, very sociable and I enjoyed this type of interaction which is involved in this profession, I have always been interested in this field, also in advertising. And then it happened that I met a family friend who works in Marketing, I visited her workplace, I studied it, I searched about it and I realised that it truly suits me because of this type of communication." (Student 38, *girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

The above narrative illustrates how attending university is constructed as an 'obvious choice' and the way Student 38 constructed herself as an agentic subject by using a discourse of personal interest. It is also evident that she could employ resources available through the possession of social capital in order to further investigate her chosen field of studies.

The following quotes also illustrate how private school students referred to specific choices, with their narratives showcasing much more detailed plans, unlike those discussed previously by students from less affluent backgrounds. The following quotes reflect these differences:

> "I want to become a Graphic Designer, I have also chosen the specific university department that I want to study in and I have also found where I want to do my Master's degree and which one it will be. It is at a French university. I have

searched online, and my sister has helped me as well." (*Student 33, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

"When I finish school, I would like to get into Law School, preferably at the University of Athens. I will also have a plan B in the U.K., but the thing is that there is no point in studying Law in the U.K. because probably there is a different legal system. I will now book my appointment with the career counsellor here at my school to discuss which is the best option if I decide to go to the U.K.. Maybe Psychology would be an option." (*Student 35, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

Family and school support in searching for university options was mentioned by most students attending private schools. A family member or a family friend providing help or access to a professional environment was often mentioned by students attending private schools. Therefore, it can be assumed that social capital, as Bourdieu (1986) argues, can provide important social links to students from more affluent backgrounds, which might help them to pursue their aspirations. In addition, as explained by Student 35 above, Private School 2 offered career services to students, a facility which was not available to students from the other schools. These factors could further explain the strategic choices of students from more affluent backgrounds.

Having in mind a detailed 'Plan B', as described by Student 35 above, was common among participants attending private schools. Although several students attending state schools also mentioned more than one field of study among their options, students attending private schools discussed these options as part of their wider career plans and not solely as choices of fields of study at a university. Furthermore, students attending private schools, and especially those at Private School 2, which offered the option of attending an IB (study abroad programme), mentioned specific universities and departments in which they aimed to pursue their studies:

> "I would like to study Architecture and I would like to get into the university department which is in Athens because I believe that this is a very good department and then after completing my BA, I would like to do my PhD abroad." (*Student 37, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

> "I will go through the IB program to study Biotechnology or Biochemistry. I want to study in England and preferably at Imperial." (*Student 39, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

> "I want to work in the Arts sector. My dream is to do animation. To begin with, I want to go to England after finishing school because I like England a lot. I am not sure about the exact university in England but for my Master's studies I want to go to California, to the UCLA where there are very good and specialised courses in my field. I am mainly interested in Fine Arts and if I complete my Master's studies there, it will be easier to find a job as an animator because some of the most successful animation companies are based in Los Angeles." (*Student 40, boy, Private School 2, Greek*)

Hence, students attending private schools apart from choosing a field of study, discussed a much more targeted plan by choosing specific university departments both in Greece and abroad. They mentioned specific areas of specialisation and discussed further plans for postgraduate studies which are also planned with their future professional career goals in mind.

As discussed in Chapter 3 ('Developing identities and shaping future aspirations'), several studies indicate that future aspirations are strongly influenced by community norms and values, but also by the type of information young people are exposed to (Bandura et al., 2001; Akos et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2014a), as well as by attitudes of parents and friends, along with their personal experiences (Akos et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2014a). The

identified differences in the present study between the narratives of young people's educational aspirations as dreams, as obvious choices or as strategic plans, can further support the argument that the role of the social class background is crucial.

In the present study, students from more affluent social class backgrounds constructed their future aspirations as strategic plans by employing resources available to them from their family and school environment. Therefore, these findings support the argument of previous studies which discussed how social class background frames students' future aspirations (Archer et al., 2014). In the present study, students from state schools who came from middle-class backgrounds constructed their choices as obvious, focusing on the extrinsic values of entering Higher Education, whereas students from more disadvantaged backgrounds constructed their educational aspirations as 'dreams'. These differences may also be explained by previous research findings arguing that the kinds of careers that young people encounter in their everyday lives may influence their perceptions of the range of futures which are available to them (Ellison et al., 2014a). Section 7.2 will explore further the factors which frame young people's future aspirations, as reported by the participants in this study.

7.2 Factors influencing aspirations

During the interview, participants were asked about the factors which influenced their future aspirations (e.g., 'How did you decide about your future career aspirations? Have you been inspired by someone/something about your plans? What or whom has influenced your decision?'). The factors mentioned by the interview participants were the following: family, academic performance, job security, earning money, personal interests, life experiences, school counselling, 'It suits me' and social media.

Most participants mentioned academic performance as one of the main factors which guided their decisions. Their family and their personal interests were also mentioned by several students. Regarding family, some participants referred to receiving advice from

their parents on their future educational and career choices, but there were also some participants who mentioned a parent's or other family member's occupation as a reason for choosing a similar career path themselves. In addition, some participants referred to certain life experiences which shaped their future aspirations, most of these being related to out-of-school activities.

There were also some participants who explained that their future aspirations were based on what 'suits them', choosing careers that they could imagine themselves in. Regarding the role of social media, there were two students (Student 33 and Student 37) who referred explicitly to their use of social media as playing a decisive role in the development of their future aspirations (the cases of these students will be discussed in Section 7.3.2).

Participants from state schools referred to financial benefits and stability as factors which they considered before choosing a particular career or field of study, whereas all participants who referred to receiving advice from counselling services were attending private schools and explained that these services were provided by their school. As discussed in Section 7.1.3, these findings indicate the existence of classed patterns in developing future aspirations and the crucial role of young people's social class background (these issues will be further discussed in Section 7.2.7).

7.2.1 Academic performance

As identified in Section 7.1, most participants wanted to enter Higher Education. The Greek educational system requires students to take the national exams (Panhellenic examination) by the end of the third year of high school to enter a university department of their choice. During the Panhellenic examination, all students across all Greek cities are examined on the same date, undertaking the same test in a set number of subjects. Students' admission to Higher Education institutions is based on their performance in the Panhellenic examination. After the end of the exams, students complete a form indicating their choice of specific university departments in order of preference. Each university

department admits a set number of participants from those who applied, based on their performance in the Panhellenic examination[70].

Therefore, since access to Greek university departments is directly related to students' performance in the Panhellenic examination, it is little surprising that most students who participated in this study related their future aspirations directly to their school performance. Students choose university departments according to their performance in school subjects, in an attempt to set realistic and achievable goals. Most participants who referred to their school performance as a key factor explained that they chose certain university departments because they believe that these are the departments to which they can gain admission, without relating their choice to personal interests. However, there were also students who explained that their performance in certain school subjects had led to cultivation of a personal interest in studying further a certain field or to following a related career path. In the case illustrated by the following quote, doing well in a certain subject was the sole reason for deciding on a professional path:

> "I started learning English from a very young age, as soon as I started going to primary school. I have grown up with English and throughout the years I was very good in English, so my teachers mainly at the afternoon school were telling me that I am good, that I 've got it, so this gave me the feeling that I am good and then I wanted to continue it as a profession." (*Student 18, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

There were also students who reported a reverse way of thinking about the same issue, saying that although they were interested in a certain career path, they decided not to pursue it because their performance in the required subjects was not satisfactory. Therefore, students tend to develop aspirations which are framed by extrinsic factors and are driven by educational attainment and academic outcomes.

[70] Detailed information about the Greek educational system can be found in the most recent report provided by OECD (2018) Education for a Bright Future in Greece. *Reviews of National Policies for Education*. OECD Publishing: Paris.

Student 13 (girl, State School 2, Greek), from a working-class background, explained that she plans to attend a Vocational college, justifying her choice as based solely on her poor school performance:

> "I have decided that I don't want to take the national exams to enter university. I think that it is very hard for me to make it. I want to go to a private or state college (IEK), depending on my grades. The state college requires a better grade. If I don't make it I will go to a private college (IEK) to qualify to work at a nursery." (*Student 13, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

She used an agentic discourse of 'school performance' and constructed herself as not capable enough to enter university, reflecting an individualistic view of her ability to achieve her future plans without discussing any structural factors in relation to her choice. Although most students discussed their choices in agentic terms without referring to the role of social structures, it has been identified that the role of their family and social class background is crucial in shaping these aspirations, as will be discussed in Section 7.2.2.

7.2.2 The influence of family habitus and family capital on future aspirations

The crucial role of the family background underpinned the narratives of several students who participated in the present study. Some participants discussed their personal interests, life experiences and their perception that a certain career or field of studies 'suits them'. All these narratives shared a common underlying theme which emphasises the role of the family background in shaping their aspirations. Along with these narratives, there were several cases of participants who referred directly to their family background in relation to their aspirations by discussing the role of parental occupation.

Several students referred to a personal interest related to out-of-school activities such as drawing and sports:

> "First of all, I enjoy drawing very much and especially animation, I think it is very sweet and I don't know how to explain it, but I think it is something that you do for a good cause because you can give joy to young kids. Generally, I believe that I have a very good relationship with younger kids and if I combine all these I believe that I will have a very content life." (*Student 40, boy, Private School 2, Greek*)

> "I enjoyed doing sports since I was very young. Also, my friends told me to start getting involved because I like it so much. And I like it and I want to do it. I would also like to get involved professionally with kick-boxing, but this will be tough for me to make it, there are no money to train for kick-boxing, it is very difficult for me. So, I look forward to the future, if something comes up, an opportunity to do it, I might go." (*Student 45, boy, Evening School, Greek*)

In the narratives of these two students, it can be observed that although both discuss how their personal interests have sparked their wish to follow a certain career path, the realisation of these aspirations is understood and imagined differently. To Student 40, the realisation of his aspirations is understood as a feasible plan and he discusses how this career path would combine a sense of purpose along with personal interests. On the other hand, for Student 45, following a career related to his personal interest is understood as a luxury option and not feasible, due to the cost of attending a private College to pursue this career. Hence, these differences can provide further evidence to support previous findings which argue that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds may also develop high aspirations, but are less likely to have access to the economic and social capital required to fulfil these aspirations (Archer et al., 2014).

Most students who discussed how certain life experiences have influenced their future aspirations were attending private schools (6 students out of 8). Some of them discussed the role of their family in providing the opportunities to engage in out-of-school activities which contributed to the development of their ambitions. For example, Student 37 and

Student 38 described how visiting cultural spaces with members of their family and participating in cultural activities were important experiences shaping their future aspirations. As they said, these experiences created a need as they were growing up to engage with relevant activities (acting, drawing) and to work in relevant fields. Their life experiences were tied to their family capital, as they both relate:

> "I was visiting museums very often with my mother and my sister and then there were many activities for children who could draw, and this was a stimulus for me. Also, my father is a civil engineer and he has been involved in this wider field which is very closely related to Architecture, so I saw how he was working and I started learning from his mentality." (*Student 37, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

> "Regarding my wish to be involved in acting and in theatre, is something that my mum has got me into it since I was very young. She was very interested in it and we were going to many theatre shows so her interest became 'contagious' and I became interested as well, and my sister too. I was going on stage and I was not feeling afraid, I was feeling that I am were I am supposed to be, I was feeling myself." (*Student 38*[71]*, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

Participation in certain educational activities such as school projects and summer camps was also discussed by some students as crucial in developing and modifying their future aspirations:

> "I like history very much as a subject and when I was in the first year of high school I took part in a school project about contemporary history and this made me like history even more, so I decided that this is what I want to study." (*Student 24, boy, Private School 1, Greek*)

[71] Student 38 described a career in acting as an additional choice to pursuing a career in Marketing (as it will be discussed later).

> "In the past I wanted to study Law, because I was watching a series and I thought that I would be very good in it. But last summer my parents enrolled me to attend a course about Law in a summer camp where I went to and it seemed to me very tiring and boring. So, I started thinking about Medicine because I like Biology as a subject and Chemistry." (*Student 39, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

All four students above (ST37, ST24, ST38, ST39) came from more affluent social class backgrounds. They all discussed their experiences as directly related to their families' background. Previous studies have suggested that the uneven distribution of capital between families from different social class backgrounds plays a crucial role in the development of young people's aspirations (Archer et al., 2014). The narratives of the students above indicated how students could deploy their families' social and cultural capital to participate in various educational and social activities which were crucial to structuring their future aspirations.

By contrast with these narratives, Student 8 earlier described how her interest in Medicine was related solely to her experience of visiting a doctor's office. Student 6 who attends a state school gave a very different account of how certain life experiences shaped her future aspirations. Specifically, Student 6, described how facing adversities while growing up was one of the main reasons for her decision to study Psychology:

> "Initially it was through Wattpad that I realised that I am interested in studying Psychology as I explained already. But what also influenced my decision is that every person has been through some rough experiences in their life and I must admit that I have been through difficult experiences as well. Regardless of my age. So, I would like to help other people who could be helped and may have been through similar experiences, so this is my biggest motivation. Many students would say that they get advice from their parents when they make decisions about such things, I will say that the only person I trust and whose opinion matters to me is my

best friend. She has been on my side as if she was my sister for many years and I take her advice about everything." (*Student 6, girl, State School 1, Greek/Albanian*)

The main difference between the narratives of Students 6 and 8 who came from less affluent backgrounds, and the ones offered earlier by Students 37, 38, 39 attending private schools, can be identified in the way the role of the family is discussed. Regarding the role of family, Archer et al. (2012) have theorised the notion of family habitus as a framework of dispositions which is developed through the sense of family's collective identity and which plays a crucial role in shaping its members' perceptions of their choices.

The cases of Students 6 and 8 illustrate the absence of the family's contribution in developing their future aspirations whereas Students 37, 38 and 39 discussed explicitly the important role of their family in their decisions. These students explained how they were encouraged by engagement in out-of-school activities directly related to their future aspirations (summer camp, theatre plays) and also discussed the way a family member's job influenced their aspirations. Hence, their family habitus (Archer et al., 2012) played an important role in making their aspirations thinkable and shaping their sense of what felt appropriate for them.

As Student 38 mentioned, her interest in theatre and acting was 'contagious', a narrative which indicated that the sense of her identity was directly related to that of her mother's. It can be understood that her aspirations were guided and shaped by the framework of dispositions developed through her family. Her family influenced her sense of what felt right for her (habitus) but also provided access to resources such as theatre lessons and theatre plays (social and cultural capital) which enabled her to gain an understanding of the career she would like to follow. Therefore, it can be argued that family habitus and family capital are crucial to the process of developing future aspirations.

Among the participants, there were four students who justified their choices regarding their future aspirations by mentioning explicitly that these choices were professions that were 'suitable' for them, emphasising traits of their personality in relation to the skills required for these professions. All these students were attending private schools and in their narratives, they all reported being familiar with their chosen profession and the required skills by having a person in their social circle who worked in the same field and who introduced them to it. The following quotes by two of the participants are the most representative examples:

> "Regarding Marketing and Business Management, I was dreaming since I was little that I am working in this field where you are sitting in a big round table and I present things. I have always been very good in communication, very sociable and I enjoyed this interaction that is involved in this profession, I have always been interested in this field, also in advertising. And then it happened that I met a family friend who works in marketing; I visited her workplace, I studied it, I searched about it and I realised that it truly suits me because of this communication." (*Student 38, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

> "I like Marketing and Psychology. Regarding Psychology, I am a person who is empathetic, and I can relate to what someone else is going through. I have also been visiting a psychologist for many years, so I am familiar with the profession and I really like it. Regarding Marketing, I feel that I will be good at it because again I can understand how other people might think. My dad is working at a big company in a related field, so we discuss a lot about these things, I see how he works every day at home and I think I would be good in Marketing." (*Student 25, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

Although all four started by discussing aspects of their personality which they believed made them suitable for their chosen professions, they explained that this knowledge of the

professional field and its required skills comes from their family background. Student 25 described how particular experiences related to her family habitus (discussions of Marketing with her father, visiting a Psychologist) and social capital (her family's social network) shaped her future aspirations.

Among the total sample, only the participants who attended one of the private schools reported attending meetings with career counsellors to identify which career options would be more suitable for them. Two of the students explained that attending these counselling appointments were decisive for their choices regarding their future aspirations. As they explained, by discussing the matter with the school counsellors they could identify the fields of study which were more suitable for them according their personal interests, school performance and personality traits.

Although it has been identified in this thesis that there were several cases of students who discussed implicitly how their family habitus influenced their future aspirations, there were many participants who discussed explicitly the direct relationship between their family's professional/occupational background and their aspirations. Most students who discussed their family background reported that one (or more) of their family members worked in the same professional/occupational field which they themselves wanted to follow. Being familiar with the professional/occupational field was reported by all the participants who discussed the role of parental occupation in developing their own aspirations. Some of them explained that they were genuinely interested in the same profession as their parents, without being advised by them to follow a similar career path (just one of the participants explained that parental advice was the sole reason for choosing a particular field):

> "My mother is a doctor, so I have surely been influenced by her, but I like science a lot in general. Since I was a child I was interested in science, in research and I have searched about it a lot on my own, that's why I chose to study medicine. My mom has never told me 'You should become a doctor' and she has never told me what to

> study or what to do. But surely my mom's interests have played an important role because she had books at home and since I was a child I would sit down and read through them." (*Student 12, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "My father and my uncle are truck drivers, and my uncle owns a truck. And it is nice, the truck is very big, and it is nice to travel with it, you can see nice things. And since I was 3 years old, after nursery school I was going to the truck with my father or my uncle. So, it is fine." (*Student 44, boy, Evening School, Greek*)

Interestingly, parental professional/occupational background was mentioned by participants from diverse social class backgrounds, and from state, private and evening schools alike. Although previous studies have argued that working-class students are less likely to aspire to follow the career path of a family member (Archer et al., 2014), in the present study it has been observed that were cases of participants attending evening school who expressed the will to follow a career similar to that of a family member. A common narrative among these participants is the sense of familiarity which they gained from knowing about the chosen professional field through their parents' experience.

Apart from discussing their parents' or family members' professional/occupational background, some participants referred to their parents' advice to follow a certain professional field which they considered a 'good job':

> "Generally, I decided about it because I have relatives who do these jobs and they say to me that it is a good job. That's it." (*Student 43, boy, Evening School, Greek*)

Their understanding of a 'good job', as they explained it, was based on criteria such as job security, stability and salary. As will be discussed in the following section, some participants referred to these factors as key influences on their future aspirations.

7.2.3 Job security and financial benefits: Searching for stability

All the participants who referred to job security and income as important factors shaping their aspirations were students attending state schools, plus one student from evening school. In their narratives, these students underlined their need for financial stability, emphasising this as the most important factor in deciding on their future aspirations:

> "Firstly, I really like the subjects that are included in the finance course. But also, it is something very useful that will not be replaced by something else, for example from machines. It cannot be replaced because it needs human minds. And it is something that will offer me money and I also have some personal connections, some people I know who can get me into a job like this, so I will not have to search for a job abroad." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "I like Chemistry and Biology, so I am thinking to pursue paramedical or dietician studies because these professions can offer you the ability to earn money after studying." (*Student 2, girl, State School 1, Greek*)

Both students prioritised their need to 'earn enough money' and to be able to find a job in the Greek employment market. A similar narrative was also expressed by the only student from an evening school planning to pursue university studies, who talked of the need to secure a stable job:

> "Basically, I am thinking to become a nurse because a doctor, someone who works at a hospital, is never left without money, he is essential. The hospital will always operate, you will never be left unemployed, you will always have a job. I was thinking also about working as a nails beautician because I like doing nails but in this you will be left without a job because who has money nowadays?" (*Student 42, girl, Evening School, Greek*)

Unsurprisingly, all four participants who discussed job security as a key factor influencing their future aspirations were from more disadvantaged backgrounds, with parents who were secondary/high school graduates, currently unemployed or employed in semi-skilled/unskilled jobs. The discourse of 'stability' (emerging in accounts of 'having enough') has also been reported in previous studies (Brown, 2011; Ahmed, 2014) as dominant in young people's narratives about their constructions of work and success in the context of austerity (Mendick et al., 2018).

7.2.4 Perceived obstacles to achieving aspirations

During the interview process, participants were asked about whether they believed that there are obstacles which can prevent them from fulfilling their future aspirations. The following obstacles were mentioned: the Greek context, school performance and personal effort, and financial problems. Some participants also expressed the view that 'There are no obstacles'/'You can achieve anything if you try'.

School performance and personal effort (studying hard, concentrating) were the obstacles to achieving their future aspirations that were most cited by participants. As discussed earlier, students' performance in the Panhellenic examination is understood as one of the most important step towards achieving their future aspirations by enabling them to attend a university course of their choice. Therefore, personal efforts to study and succeed in the examination process are understood as crucial by the participants:

> "I just have to study, there is no other obstacle." (*Student 3, girl, State School 1, Greek*)

> "The only obstacle that I may have to face is myself because many times I discourage myself on my own because also my social environment is very supportive, and I think that when the time comes my country will be supportive as well and my teachers and my social circle. Which means that if I decide it and if I

> believe in myself, I don't think that there will be any other obstacle." (*Student 33, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

In addition, some participants observed that getting into a prestigious university department, in particular, requires a lot of personal effort. Most participants who discussed personal effort and grades expressed the view that they did not see any other obstacles to fulfilling their aspirations. Achieving certain grades, managing stress and being able to concentrate were among the issues which were discussed by participants in relation to personal effort and school achievement:

> "I think that first and foremost the obstacle will be my own anxiety and stress because I get very stressed and I already know that I won't perform in the exams as well as I could because of the stress." (*Student 34, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

> "Basically, I believe that everything happens for a reason, always. Even if I don't get to Law School in Greece I believe that I will find my way. But to get to Law in Athens the only obstacle is maintaining my self-discipline and concentration. In general, I don't concentrate easily, there is no other obstacle." (*Student 35, girl, Private School 2, Greek)*

Like Student 35 mentioned above, participants from private schools appeared to be more optimistic regarding their future aspirations since several of them explained that they had alternative study plans in case they did not achieve the expected outcome in the Panhellenic exams. A narrative which indicated the existence of alternative plans is the following (also from a student attending a private school):

> "I believe that there might be some obstacles regarding acting, not regarding Marketing. About finding a job in acting, but that's the reason why I chose the National School of Theatre in Athens because there you have a bit more luck. But in general, I don't act and take decisions thinking about whether there are obstacles.

I prefer to think that I will do what I want to do." (*Student 38, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

By contrast, students from state schools referred to the Greek context, the economic crisis and the high rates of unemployment as potential obstacles to achieving their aspirations:

> "Look, if there is something that is an obstacle to achieving my aspirations, it is mostly the country. That there is no future, there is no future in computing. There is no future in Greece in general, that's the bad thing, here there is no future about almost anything, for most things there is nothing here. So, I have to go abroad to do this and to study further." (*Student 1, boy, State School 1, Greek*)

> "I believe that finding a job will be an obstacle." (*Student 19, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

Three students (two from state schools and one from an evening school) discussed their family's financial difficulties and mentioned that this could be an obstacle to pursuing their future aspirations. Unsurprisingly, all three participants were from disadvantaged social class backgrounds, with parents in semi-skilled/unskilled occupations. Another two participants from similar social class backgrounds (one from state school and one from evening school) also expressed worries that they would not be able to succeed in achieving their aspirations:

> "I might get tired, because it is difficult. Maybe I get tired of studying or you might get disappointed at some point, you have to have a lot of strength and courage." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2*, Albanian)

> "Maybe there is an obstacle. Maybe I cannot become a technician, I am not sure if I can." (*Student 43, boy, Evening School, Greek*)

These narratives illustrate that success or failure is sometimes understood as an outcome of personal responsibility, with no reference to structural or other factors. The importance of personal responsibility was also reflected in the views of participants who argued that trying hard and having the will to achieve your aspirations are the most important factors in eventually achieving them:

> "Well, regarding the financial situation Greece is in a very bad situation, but OK I think that if someone wants something a lot, you can achieve it, I am not feeling discouraged." (*Student 12, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "I believe I will make it, through a lot of effort and great will." (*Student 13, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "An obstacle would be if I don't get to get to the university department that I want, but I believe that if I try hard I will make it, as long as I want it much." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

Interestingly, all students who referred to 'trying hard' were attending state schools and almost all of them had parents who were both unemployed (Student 10, Student 17 - one parent unemployed, Student 18). This narrative about 'hard work' will be further discussed in Section 7.3.3, as several participants discussed this in relation to content curated through social media platforms. Although these participants expressed their worries about not achieving the grades needed to enter university, they also reported having no alternative plan for the future.

7.2.5 Socially structured patterns of aspiration

Based on the qualitative findings about participants' future aspirations and the factors which influence their development, it can be argued that patterns of future aspirations are shaped by structural forces related to young people's social locations.

Although most participants referred to school performance as the most important factor influencing their future aspirations, their narratives also indicated the importance of the role of the family in shaping young people's aspirations in various ways; but they did not discuss explicitly the role of social structures, constructing themselves in agentic terms. To discuss the role of social structures and how the role of the family is significant in shaping students' aspirations, Bourdieu's (1986, 1990, 1992) concepts of 'habitus' and 'capital' have been used in previous sections of this chapter.

As discussed in Section 7.1, several differences in the narratives between students attending different types of schools have been observed. Although most participants reported that they aspire to continue their studies in Higher Education, participants from private schools discussed their plans with reference to specific strategic choices as part of further career planning. Participants from more affluent backgrounds described how their family habitus and family capital are shaping their future aspirations. On the other hand, participants from less affluent backgrounds, despite developing high aspirations, appeared more insecure about their choices and focused more on aiming at professions which could offer stability.

Gendered patterns of aspirations have been identified, as careers in Psychology and Education were mentioned only by girls, whereas careers in Computing were only mentioned by boys. In the area of engineering, girls only mentioned Architecture as among their choices. However, studies in Medicine and Finance were mentioned by both boys and girls. The identified gendered pattern may reflect how some girls take up discourses of femininity which construct women as caring and selfless (Walkerdine et al., 2001; Skelton and Francis, 2009), and also illustrate the association of fields such as Computing with masculinity, in the sense that these fields are viewed as suitable for boys, and less so for girls. In addition, regarding the Greek context, a similar pattern has been reported in previous studies in relation to the gender gap in education, which indicated that girls are

under-represented in Computing and STEM university courses (Kordaki and Berdousis, 2017), but relatively over-represented in Education and Humanities courses (Livanos and Pouliakas, 2012).

Regarding *ethnikotita*, although the number of non-Greek participants in the interviews was small, it has been observed that non-Greek participants develop ambitious aspirations. However, the realisation of their aspirations seems more like 'a dream' to them than a strategic plan; they also mention the absence of family guidance in their decision-making process regarding their futures. It should also be mentioned that all four non-Greek participants were coming from a working-class background. Earlier research into the career aspirations of young people from different ethnic groups has provided conflicting findings and it has been questioned whether these differences between ethnic groups reflect socio-economic status differences (Howard et al., 2011). Thus, further research is needed to investigate the extent to which differences associated with ethnicity may also reflect issues related to differences in participants' social class background.

7.3 The influence of social media practices on future aspirations

Students did not mention social media as a main source of influence on their future aspirations. However, more than half of them reported using social media platforms to explore content related to these aspirations. Although factors such as academic performance, family background and personal interests were among those mentioned by participants as the most influential in their future educational and career aspirations, they acknowledged that content on social media shapes some perceptions regarding their future aspirations. A similar pattern was identified in the questionnaire findings, presented in Section 5.8 of Chapter 5 ('Young people's social media practices in Greece'), which indicated that more than half of the students admitted that their engagement in social media had made them reflect on their future aspirations.

7.3.1 Instrumental uses of social media

When asked about the specific types of social media practices in which they engage in relation to their future aspirations, participants discussed two instrumental uses of social media platforms: following university accounts and exploring content related to their aspirations.

Only two interview participants (Student 4 - *girl, State School 1, Albanian* and Student 14 - *girl, State School 1, Greek*) reported following social media accounts of Universities. Both explained that they follow Universities' social media accounts to be informed about aspects other than the courses and modules being offered, since they wanted instead to be informed about the social activities organised by these Universities:

> "I have searched for some university departments because I like to see their activities and their communities, because I wanted to see how things are and in case I go to these Universities." (*Student 14, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

This instrumental use of social media was described as very useful for both participants, who explained that social media provide access to aspects of the university context which are not available to them through the offline context. In the Greek context, open days for prospective students are organised mainly by private universities and colleges, whereas this is not a common practice for state universities. Both students explained that through social media they could gain access to the university community and get informed about aspects related to campus life, which would not be possible unless they knew someone who was already studying at their desired department.

By following these university accounts, students can find not only new resources but also people who belong to the university community. Therefore, it can be argued that by engaging in this social media practice young people can potentially expand their social capital. Both students who discussed this practice were attending state schools and one of

them (Student 4) was from a working-class background. In previous studies, it has been evidenced that students from less affluent backgrounds utilise social media features to advance their education by communicating with peers about university options and careers; it has also been argued that bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) may be facilitated by participation in online communities on social media which enables access to information, resources and peer support (Greenhow and Burton, 2011).

Exploring content on social media regarding future aspirations was the other type of social media practice which also provided access to information and resources. Regarding the types of resources, some students described finding educational activities and events through the use of Facebook:

> "I saw a post on Facebook about a seminar on Criminal Psychology, which I have never heard before, so I searched about this field after seeing these and I also discussed it at school to find more about it, so I decided that I might do a Master later on this." (*Student 21, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

> "I have been informed about seminars related to my studies interests through notifications and accounts on Facebook and through mailing lists to which I have subscribed." (*Student 34, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

Therefore, social media provided access not only to information and online resources but also to offline resources such as educational seminars. Subscribing to related pages and mailing lists is a more advanced way of being notified about seminars and events which may be of interest. However, no other participant reported a similar practice. Some participants also explained that they used social media to explore practical aspects, such as potential workplaces in their area, or searching for ideas about combining fields of study:

> "I have tried to see through social media how I could combine dance and psychology because I think that psychology is the only field that can be related to

dance. I also search for dance related things." (*Student 20, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

"I looked for boxing schools where I could go to study." (*Student 45, boy, Evening School, Greek*)

Most participants who discussed exploring content online referred to watching relevant videos, reading relevant articles and comments posted online, and following pages (especially on Facebook) with relevant content about the wider professional field in which they were interested. As Student 22 relates below, many students explained that their interest in a specific field of studies or career was the reason for following relevant online accounts in the field they are interested in:

"Because I have decided that I want to study Architecture, I like to see relevant content. I follow some relevant pages which post photos and relevant articles." (*Student 22, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

"I have been definitely influenced by things I see on social media which relate to my aspirations. Personally, I like medicine for example, so I follow some pages of doctors and I really like that, I can see photographs and I like it even more. I have also seen people commenting that studying Medicine is difficult and that you may find it hard to graduate, but I really want it, so I don't care. I use social media to search for anything that I am interested in, to search resources, there is everything in there. You can find so many things there." (*Student 8, girl, State School 2, Albanian*)

As Student 8 explained, exploring content on social media about future plans is not restricted to online accounts or to pages of a certain professional field, but also includes reading other people's views on these professions. Access to social media resources is therefore understood as providing access not only to established professionals but also to

public opinion about this professional field, as these are presented through social media platforms. Seeing other people's professional activity through social media was also discussed by two participants who described how they have formed certain assumptions about their future plans based on what they have seen on social media:

> "I have seen on social media that now everyone is into fitness so becoming a Dietician helps." (*Student 2, girl, State School 1, Greek*)

> "I have followed and seen the career of people, of how it has been developed throughout the years and that almost everyone has quit their studies and devoted themselves to something else or that their studies didn't get them anywhere. So, this made me reflect and think more about it, about what I want to do in my life and if it can lead somewhere, if it will get me a job and to have some money to be able to live. So, I think I can say that it has put me in a thinking mode that maybe it is better not to study what I like but something that will be beneficial for my life later on. Although I don't know if this is the right thing to do." (*Student 26, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

Interestingly, in the narratives of both these students, social media content is understood as providing a representative and realistic view of the professional activities of others. Although access to information and resources can potentially benefit students by expanding their social capital as discussed above, it is also important to be aware of the tendency to view social media platforms as purely authentic and neutral sources of information, a tendency which poses the risk of consuming online content without having the required level of criticality. Student 8 appeared to lack information about her desired profession; therefore, she described how she used social media platforms to access information about it. As discussed in Chapter 6 ('Developing identities'), social media platforms also provide space for fake or inflated representations. Therefore, seeing online representations of the careers of others (as described by Student 26 in the quote above) and

examples of ‘success’, may be misleading. The ways in which consumption of social media content influences young people’s understandings of success will be further discussed in Section 7.3.3.

7.3.2 Social media practices reinforcing aspirations

As mentioned in Section 7.2, several students mention social media platforms among the factors influencing their future aspirations. These students discussed how certain social media practices (watching videos and posts of established professionals in certain fields, participating in online discussions, reading online posts and following pages of organisations) have inspired them to study a certain field or to engage in activities such as volunteering:

> “The things that I have read in Wattpad and the interactions with other people have influenced my decision to study Psychology. By reading various books on Wattpad I started wondering whether all people could think in this way, if they can change their emotions and way of thinking. And this created a query about how the human mind is thinking so I decided to study Psychology.” (*Student 6, girl, State School 1, Greek/Albanian*)

> “I have been inspired by social media regarding the professional aspects. By watching for example scientists in TedX who go there and discuss about subjects that they have researched or through other researchers who have completed Master’s degrees and you can see them online, I really like watching and reading these things.” (*Student 12, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> “I have watched some videos on Facebook posted by Unicef and another NGO which made me want even more to work with children but also I thought about being involved in volunteering activities.” (*Student 13, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

These narratives reflect boyd's (2014) argument that by embracing technology young people are attempting to imagine new possibilities and to find ways of participating in public life as well as to take ownership of their lives. There were also two cases of students who described how their online social media practices, and especially the practice of browsing online content related to their aspirations, shaped or reinforced their future aspirations and their interests in their chosen fields:

> "Basically the main source of inspiration about graphic design and drawing which I want to study and follow professionally was an account that I found on Tumblr which had designs and drawings from my favourite book series and this then inspired me more and it changed me, and I thought that I can do it as well and then I loved it and I decided that this is what I want to do professionally." (*Student 33, girl, Private School 1, Greek*)

> "I am thinking seriously to study Architecture and social media has played a crucial role in developing my interest in it. I started being more interested when I watched videos about how other people build things and I have started watching videos to make things on my own, to construct things. I haven't discovered how to create things on my own before watching these things." (*Student 37, girl, Private School 2, Greek*)

All participants who reported aspiring to study Arts and Architecture stated that browsing content on social media in relation to this field was a common practice which reinforced their aspirations. Access to these online resources was very important for all these participants, who explained that social media offer them the opportunity to see diverse images, gain creative inspiration, and access sources of knowledge about Arts and Architecture.

The narratives of the students as presented above show how they use social media platforms not only to expand their offline interests but also shape new interests, thus illustrating the blurred boundary between young people's online and offline 'lifeworlds' (Erstad et al., 2013) and indicating that the online and offline social contexts are experienced by young people as linked and interconnected to each other (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011).

7.3.3 Social media practices reinforcing discourses of 'success' and 'cruel optimism'

As described in Section 7.2, most participants in this study reported that their future aspirations were not influenced by their social media practices. School performance, personal interests and family habitus appear to be the most important factors influencing aspirations. However, several students (all attending state schools) referred to the influence of social media on their understanding of 'success'. A common narrative among these students was that through their use of social media and particularly through exploring content online and following social media accounts of celebrities and 'successful people', they had learnt about people who in the past had been 'like them' and had come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but still managed to achieve their dreams and become successful.

These examples of 'success' were described by several students, and successful and 'self-made' people were described as role models and sources of inspiration for these students to follow their own dreams:

> "Regarding how I imagine myself in the future, I think I may be influenced by the progress I see on social media accounts of someone who is a celebrity or someone who is very famous and the way that they have achieved this, this may influence me, I have it as a role model." (*Student 7, boy, State School 2, Greek*)

> "I have been very much inspired by actors and singers I see on social media. I mean that these people have fought about what they are doing and we all start from something small and we might end up in something great. So, this gives me courage not to stop and to follow my dreams and achieve the things I want." (*Student 23, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

These narratives resonate with Mendick et al.'s (2018: 80) argument that young people's discourses about 'aiming high' manifest the dominant discourses of celebrity success as 'entrepreneurial, corresponding to the future-oriented, flexible and resourceful individual at the centre of austere meritocracy'. In this discourse, hard work and determination are considered crucial to success. Examples of celebrities and online role models who have become successful appear to shape young people's understanding of success and promote the discourse of success as individualised, diminishing the role of structural factors. This entrepreneurial notion of success dominated participants' narratives. Several participants especially emphasised the importance of being passionate and trying hard in order to succeed. As argued by Biressi and Nunn (2013), within austerity success is being characterised as achievable through the investment of one's personal drive and passion. Therefore 'success' is constructed by these young people as an individualised accomplishment.

For some of these students, these examples of 'success' were related to certain types of lifestyles. Two of them described how these media images are connected with aspiring to more affluent lifestyles:

> "I really want to make some of my dreams come true. I have seen on social media people achieving their dreams and my will to achieve my own dreams is growing more and more and I want even more than before to achieve my dreams, so I will fight even more. So yes, I get more influenced by the things I see on social media. I would like very much to travel a lot, to meet new places, new people, new cultures,

> to see something different than what I am living in now. I also use social media to see what might offer me more money to make my dreams come true." (*Student 10, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> "You know, what is presented on social media mostly is parties, money, nice girls, so ok this influences you, you want to get this lifestyle as well. I like this lifestyle." (*Student 17, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

As Mendick et al. (2018) have highlighted, money is framed implicitly as a requirement for success in the context of 'austere meritocracy'. The concept of 'austere meritocracy' encapsulates the tension between the urge of young people to aspire within the ideal of meritocracy and the erosion of opportunities for upward mobility (Mendic et al., 2018): an attitude which is also characterised as 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011), in the sense that young people must continue to develop these aspirations at the same time as their opportunities for upward social mobility and job security are disappearing. Although earning a lot of money or becoming rich was not expressed as an aspiration by the participants in the present study, it was tied to their discourses around 'success'.

Among the participants, Student 17 was a distinctive case who, despite reporting that he would take part in the Panhellenic exams with the aim of entering the Finance Department at the University of Athens, emphasised that he did not intend to graduate and get a Bachelor's degree:

> "First of all, I would like to develop further what I am doing right now, being a PR in nightclubs, I really like nightlife. I want to develop this further, to have others working below me, to earn more money. I want also to get my tennis certificate and to start doing lessons. I want to get into university, to a Finance Department but I don't really want to engage with that. I want to get into university for the public relations and the networks, it is just an alternative option. I want to go to university

basically because it can open doors for you. You just have to get into university and then you do whatever you want. It is not my goal to graduate or to work in this field." (Student 17, boy, State School 3, Greek)

Therefore, this participant saw attending university as a way of expanding his social networks, which might also help him to develop further his engagement with nightlife. He explained that, for him, going to the university was in a sense seen as an obstacle. As the following quote illustrates, gaining access to Higher Education was only important to him for its extrinsic values:

> "As I explained, I want to be more involved in working in nightlife after finishing school but what is truly an obstacle for me is actually taking the Panhellenic exams and going to the university. I have also stopped working now as a PR to study more and take the exams, so it is already bothering me. I must succeed in the exams no matter what because I don't want to take them again next year if I fail and I want to get to a university in Athens no matter what, I don't want to go to another city. So, you can say that going to the university is the step forward but also the obstacle for me. Everybody is saying that getting to the university is the ultimate success, but I feel trapped and I feel that when I get through it after I finish with this, all roads will be open. I just want to go to university to expand my networks and develop my PR activities, because university can open new doors. I don't know if I want to graduate, I want to get into university and then do whatever I want. Maybe this sounds too ambitious, but I am ambitious, and I believe that if you have the capabilities, the potential and if you really want something, you can make it." (*Student 17, boy, State School 3, Greek*)

This view that 'if you have the potential, if you really want something, you can make it' was also expressed by other participants who constructed success as highly dependent on how much you want to succeed and how hard you work for it. Participants' narratives

about ‘success’ reflected an individualised understanding which was directly related to the notion of ‘hard work’. Developing higher aspirations was referred to also as a result of seeing inspirational examples of successful individuals on social media:

> “Mainly what has influenced me is that there are many people who work hard to achieve their goals, and this has influenced me in the sense that I want to work like they do to achieve the things I want to do in the future.” (*Student 14, girl, State School 3, Greek*)

Hence, hard work appears to be a powerful discourse through which young people position themselves as capable of achieving their dreams if they try hard and put in the required effort (Mendick et al., 2018). Participants who discussed the importance of ‘hard work’ did not talk about the structural obstacles. However, two participants referred to the impact of class in achieving success. Although the narrative of dreaming big, working hard and being willing to achieve was common among these participants, they implicitly acknowledged the difficulty of achieving these aspirations, when mentioning that maybe success at the level seen in their role models may not be possible for them:

> “I get inspired when I see that someone has succeeded in something which is very difficult, and this makes me think that I want to try and succeed as well, *not the same thing as the people* I see but something which might be difficult, and I would like to achieve, I want to have higher goals. Social media has influenced me in this, that I want to have more goals. I want to try and do the impossible, although I know it is difficult, when I see something like this.” (*Student 11, girl, State School 2, Greek*)

> “This Greek tattoo artist is a person who became famous and reached the top by doing what he enjoys, and he has gained the respect by many people in this social circle but also from ordinary people. He made his dream come true through doing

> something that many disapproved. And I believe that if you like something a lot and you go for it and chase your dream, you will achieve it as well. *Maybe you don't have the success at this level, but you can get close to that*." (*Student 16, boy, State School 2, Greek*)

Both participants talk about hard work but at the same time they appear to negotiate the question of whether the same degree of success can be achieved regardless of someone's background. Their discourses also indicate that structural inequalities which may shape celebrities' careers are minimised by the value of hard work.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

8.1 Responding to research questions: Summary of findings

Following a social constructionist approach and using a mixed-methods research design, this study has explored young people's social media practices (in Greece) in relation to their identities and their future educational and career aspirations. A particular focus has been placed on the role of young people's social locations in engaging with social media practices and developing future aspirations.

8.1.1 Which are the main online practices that young people (14-17 years old) engage with on social media platforms?

In the Greek context, there is a lack of recent research data about young people's social media practices, therefore the first research question of the present study aimed to explore and identify the main online practices that young people (14-17 years old) engage with on social media platforms.

The questionnaire findings indicated that the vast majority of the participants are users of social media platforms, in accordance to similar findings from the European and U.S. context (EU Kids Online, 2012; Ofcom, 2017; Anderson and Jiang, 2018; Smith and Anderson, 2018). The communicational and informational uses of social media platforms were among the most popular types of social media practices reported by the participants of the present study. These findings indicate that social media platforms are not regarded by young people solely as spaces for entertainment and communication, but also as spaces where they can access and navigate new sources of knowledge.

The qualitative findings regarding the types of social media practices revealed similar patterns to those identified in the quantitative phase. Participants emphasised the communicational use of social media but also the informational and creative use of these platforms. Young people's narratives about their online practices revealed a differentiation of their uses and attitudes across different social media platforms. The affordances

provided on each social media platform frame the practices in which users engage and many of the participants reported how they use each platform for different purposes and how they engage in different practices. In addition, participants' narratives about the ways in which their practices are differentiated across different platforms indicate that online experiences are individual, contextual and situational (Swist et al., 2015).

Participants who reported engaging in various social media practices and not just for communicational purposes, discussed diverse ways in which their practices relate to their identities. For these participants, social media platforms were presented as important spaces for connecting with friends and acquaintances, for creative work and self-expression, and for getting informed. These findings are in accordance with previous studies showing that social media platforms are used by young people as a mechanism for both expression and connection (Green et al., 2011).

8.1.2 How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their identities?

The second research question aimed to explore young people's social media practices in relation to the development of their identities. Through the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire, it was identified that all responses regarding aspects of identity were correlated to the total number of platforms that young people use and the frequency of their daily connections. Thus, participants who reported using a broad range of social media platforms and used them often, also agreed more strongly with the questionnaire's statements about the relation between social media and their sense of identity. Developing self-consciousness, receiving peer and emotional support, engaging in peer comparison practices, changing personal views on social issues, developing social skills and engaging in learning practices were identified through the qualitative analysis as the main ways in which social media practices relate to participants' identities.

For most participants, online practices are experienced and understood as part of their everyday social practices, because their online networks are linked with their offline environments. Social media constitutes a space where they navigate relationships and express themselves, thus relating directly to their everyday experiences which contribute to the shaping of their identities. Although social media are experienced as interlinked with the offline context in which participants grow up, young people highlight certain online affordances which enable some online practices. Autonomy, privacy, audiences, freedom, visibility and recognition are online affordances which motivate young people to use social media platforms (boyd, 2014).

The sense of belonging and participation in an online community was another important social media affordance which was emphasised by young people in this study. This participation was presented as a driver of students' creative expression and reflected the notion of 'participatory culture' which is characterised by support for engaging in creative practices and sharing creative products, involving a type of informal mentorship and a sense of social connection with others (Jenkins et al., 2016). In addition, for some participants the sense of social validation by receiving 'likes' was highly important and contributed to the development of an objectified sense of identity, as 'the more likes you get, the better you feel about yourself'. This finding supports Gardner and Davis's (2014) argument about the quantifiable values which can be assigned to identity through social media platforms. In this sense, identity is becoming more externally oriented and quantifiable.

Furthermore, almost all participants identified elements of learning through their use of social media, mainly related to creative and informational practices. Although all participants described engaging in informational practices on social media, only a small number of participants discussed critically the affordances of these platforms. News on social media platforms was understood as more objective, and social media platforms were

understood as neutral, with no acknowledgement of their corporate nature. This omission indicates that participants had little or no understanding of how these platforms work and how news items are curated online.

8.1.3 How do young people's online social media practices relate to the development of their educational and career aspirations?

The third research question of this study aimed to explore young people's online social media practices in relation to the development of their educational and career aspirations. Regarding future educational aspirations, the vast majority of students expressed the will to continue their studies in Higher Education. Aiming to receiving a university degree was a similar finding to earlier studies about young people in Greece (Gouvias and Vitsilakis-Soroniatis, 2005).

Students did not mention social media as a main source of influence on their future aspirations but several of them reported using social media platforms to explore online content related to these aspirations. When asked about the specific types of social media practices in which they engage in relation to their future aspirations, participants discussed two instrumental uses of social media platforms: following university accounts and exploring content related to their aspirations.

Factors such as academic performance, family background and personal interests were mentioned by participants as the most influential factors and the qualitative analysis supported the argument of previous work about the importance of the family capital and family habitus in shaping future aspirations (Archer et al., 2012; Archer et al., 2014). Based on the qualitative findings about participants' future aspirations and the factors which influence their development, it can be argued that patterns of future aspirations are shaped by structural forces related to young people's social locations. However, several interview participants also acknowledged that content on social media shapes their perceptions about issues related to their future aspirations. A similar pattern was identified in the quantitative

analysis, which indicated that more than half of the students admitted that their engagement in social media made them reflect on their future aspirations.

Several students (all attending state schools) referred to the influence of social media on their understanding of 'success'. These narratives resonate with Mendick et al.'s (2018: 80) argument that young people's discourses about 'aiming high' manifest the dominant discourses of celebrity success as 'entrepreneurial, corresponding to the future-oriented, flexible and resourceful individual at the centre of austere meritocracy'. This entrepreneurial notion of success dominated participants' narratives. Several participants especially emphasised the importance of being passionate and trying hard in order to succeed. Therefore 'success' is constructed by these young people as an individualised accomplishment. 'Hard work' appears to be a powerful discourse through which young people position themselves as capable of achieving their dreams if they try hard and put in the required effort (Mendick et al., 2018).

8.1.4 How do young people's social locations relate to their online practices and engagement with social media platforms?

The fourth research question was designed to explore young people's engagement with social media platforms in relation to their social locations. Young people's social locations appeared to influence their engagement with social media platforms. Several associations have been identified between the types of social media practices and participants' gender, type of school and level of parental education. Regarding the frequency of engagement and the types of social media practices in which young people engage with, several gender associations have been identified. Girls were more likely to engage in a greater number of platforms, more frequently, and also preferred engaging in visually-oriented platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr, supporting previous studies with similar findings (Lenhart, 2015; Twist et al., 2015). In addition, girls reported engaging in a broader variety of social media practices than boys. The quantitative analysis indicated also that girls were

more likely to report being influenced in various ways, unlike boys who explained that they were not easily influenced by social media.

Through the interviews it was identified that girls are more likely to engage in self-presentation practices. All participants who discussed how their use of social media influences their body image were girls; therefore, it can be assumed that certain gender stereotypes are being reproduced through social media platforms. Although previous empirical data have suggested that online behaviour is guided by offline gender roles and sexual norms (Subrahmanyam et al., 2006; Doornwaard et al., 2014), these findings indicate that girls' interaction with social media content may reinforce their views of femininity as tied to physical attractiveness. Girls' narratives about their body image indicate how stereotypes of femininity are being reproduced through their use of social media platforms creating risks of developing a negative body image. On the other hand, narratives about discovering online content regarding acceptance and body positivity indicate that not all girls simply absorb online content but also resist dominant stereotypes. Furthermore, relational uses of social media platforms (seeking emotional support, giving relationships advice) were discussed by girls who described how content on social media can provide emotional support. Thus, social media platforms can be seen as spaces providing both risks and opportunities for the development of a gendered identity (Ringrose and Barajas, 2011).

The type of school which young people attend was also associated with differences in their engagement with certain social media practices. The questionnaire findings indicated that students who attended evening/vocational schools were less likely to engage in many social media practices, except for playing games online, and were also less likely to report engaging in educational uses. These differences were also evident from participants' narratives during the interviews. All four participants from evening schools discussed very limited uses of their social media platforms (playing games on Facebook and viewing what

others posted). These practices indicated that they were using social media platforms solely as content consumers, without engaging or participating actively in communicative or creative practices. In contrast, students from state and private schools reported more varied uses of social media platforms (participating in group chats, posting photos, joining online groups, following interest-related accounts, sharing links and articles, etc.) and explained how their online practices were linked in various ways with their offline contexts and were also differentiated across different platforms.

Not surprisingly, educational and informational uses of social media were associated with the level of parental education. Previous studies have identified differences in the types of usage among young people from different parental education backgrounds (van Dijck, 2005; van Deursen and van Dijck, 2014). In the present study, participants from lower educated parental backgrounds were less likely to report that they engage in these types of social media practices (connecting to accounts with educational/scientific content, following University/College accounts, reading the news).

Ethnikotita was also associated with differences in young people's engagement with social media platforms. Questionnaire findings indicated that non-Greek participants were more likely to report using Twitter and were also less likely to engage in educational uses of social media platforms. The qualitative analysis of the narratives of non-Greek participants showed that all non-Greek participants reported an intensive use of social media platforms which was mainly focused on enabling social connections. Although only four interview participants were non-Greek, all of them discussed an intense use of social media platforms and described various practices in which they engaged in order to expand their social networks.

Since research on social media practices and young people is still expanding, there is a need to concentrate more on the variations of users' practices and the extent, range and types of networks in which they engage (Burnett and Merchant, 2011). The findings of the

present study indicate that young people's social locations influence their social media practices and frames their online experiences. Opinions rooted in technological determinism fail to recognise the importance of the social context in which technology and online practices are situated (boyd, 2014). Therefore, these findings further support this argument by recognising the importance of the social context in which young people engage with social media platforms and the complexity of their relationship with technology.

Recent discussions about the 'digital divide' have shifted the focus from who has access to new technologies and online platforms to who has the knowledge to use these technologies to participate in social practices and to improve their personal and social lives (Barron, 2004; Jenkins, 2009; Hargittai and Kim, 2012; Park and Lee, 2015; Shaw and Hargittai, 2018). Issues of gender, ethnicity and social class intersect and therefore it is not easy to draw clear conclusions about certain groups (Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016). However, the aforementioned findings indicate that social locations frame young people's online social media practices.

8.2 Limitations

The limitations of this thesis make its findings suggestive rather than conclusive. In addition, as discussed in Section 4.6, it is understood that the resulting analysis and discussion of findings are contingent upon the researcher's own meanings and interpretations. During the research process I have been aware of my own positioning and I do not claim to be objective, as this is consistent with the mixed methods, pragmatic approach informing this thesis.

To begin with, due to time restrictions, the sample of the present study did not involve an equal number of students from all types of schools. A study which would involve a larger number of participants from vocational and evening high schools and also a greater number of participants who are not Greek would strengthen the research analysis (both in

the quantitative and qualitative phase) regarding the role of young people's social locations.

Conducting this research project in Greece raised several challenges regarding the process of qualitative analysis. The translation of the interview transcripts from Greek to English may have had an impact in asserting their reliability. The difficulty to reproduce the exact meaning of participants' views from the one language into the other was an obvious limitation. The translated interview transcripts and the coding process were discussed with the supervisors of the research project to ensure validity and reliability.

In addition, in Chapter 2 ('Conducting research in the Greek context') the complexity of discussions of social class categories was explained. In the present study, the difficulty in defining social class categories was also linked to the lack of socio-economic information about students' background in the Greek educational system. Therefore, one of the limitations regarding the design of the study was to identify participants' social class background. Parental educational level and type of school were used to collect information about participants' social class background. However, further research which would employ more detailed information about participants' socio-economic background would provide richer findings.

In addition, several constraints with regards to the nature of this study's sample should be acknowledged. Further to the difficulty in defining students' social class background as discussed above, another constraint relates to the number of participants from each type of school. As discussed in Section 4.7, since the number of students attending evening high schools was markedly low, a vocational high school was added to the sample of participating schools. However, the number of participants from state and private schools still remained larger, both during the questionnaire and interview phases, therefore future research could focus on including more participants from less affluent social as well as non-Greek backgrounds who were underrepresented in the present study. In addition,

although during the questionnaire phase the number of boys who participated in the data collection process was almost equal to girls, during the interview phase the girls who participated were more than boys. Thus, it ought to be acknowledged that the study's findings regarding social class background, *ethnikotita* and gender, are suggestive rather than conclusive and future research is needed in order to investigate these factors deeper.

Furthermore, the limitations of the interview phase included the following two issues. Firstly, the duration of the interviews in several cases has been shorter than it was initially designed due to school restrictions. In order to overcome this limitation, a larger number of interviews was conducted. Nevertheless, the quality of the collected data may have been impacted in some cases by the shorter duration of the interviews. Secondly, it is also acknowledged that the use of creative and visual methods (Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006; Buckingham, 2009) in researching young people's identities and social media practices may have provided richer data. However, in the present study semi-structured interviews were preferred due to time restrictions.

Future research should overcome these limitations and investigate in greater depth young people's engagement with social media platforms and its relation to their identities and future aspirations.

8.3 Contribution to knowledge and implications for future research

The present study has been informed by scholarship from a range of fields. Thus, the study's findings may encourage research in the fields of youth, media and education. The contribution and implications of the present study will be discussed along with suggestions for future research and for educational policy and practice.

The research findings about young people's social media practices build on previous works about youth and media which have problematised the ways digital media relate to youth identities. As there has been relatively limited research about the ways and the reasons that

young people engage and make meanings with new media in their everyday lives (Zemmels, 2012), the present study contributes to knowledge by providing an understanding of the reasons why young people engage with social media and offers a perspective on the complexities of the context in which young people develop their identities.

In addition, building on the findings of previous research projects (Ito et al., 2008b; Greenhow and Burton, 2011; Vitak and Ellison, 2012; Wohn et al., 2013; boyd, 2014; Ellison et al., 2014a; Gardner and Davis, 2014; Livingstone, 2014; Michikyan et al., 2015; Livingstone and Sefton-Green, 2016), this research contributes to knowledge about the ways that young people navigate their lives between online and offline contexts. The present study highlights the importance of researching 'online' practices as something that is not detached from the 'offline' experiences of young people.

As it has been identified in this study, social media constitute a space where young people navigate relationships and express themselves, thus their social media practices relate directly to their everyday experiences which contribute to the shaping of their identities. The present study's original contribution lies in acknowledging the important role of the social context in young people's engagement with social media platforms and showing the complexity of their relationship with technology. Nevertheless, since social media evolves rapidly, further research is needed in order to provide deeper understandings about these issues.

Regarding research on social media practices, the findings of the present study about young people's informational uses of social media platforms contribute to emphasising the importance of media literacy. Since social media platforms are the main source of information, the need for media literacy, which focuses not only on understanding online content but also on how this content appears on the news feed and how these technical systems work, is essential. The need for media literacy is relevant both for young people

and adults (Jenkins et al., 2016). Recent research findings, about children's internet use in general, have indicated that although children are familiar with concepts related to the use of Internet, they are not able to implement the relevant practical skills and they are not always aware of the risks and opportunities which relate to their practices (Ní Bhroin and Rehder, 2018).

Thus, educational policy and practice should include interventions which focus on introducing media literacy in formal and informal education. The crucial role of media literacy has been highlighted in several recent studies (Livingstone et al., 2017; Scolari, 2018) which focus not only on children and young people but also on parents and teachers. In the Greek context, in particular, media literacy has not been implemented yet in any educational policies or practices. In addition, future research could focus more in the field of media literacy in order to provide better guidance both to teachers, parents and young people to face the challenges and foster the opportunities of living and learning in the digital age. Future educational research could raise more questions and explore how children and young people can be supported to develop the skills needed to navigate their lives in this contemporary context.

With particular reference to the Greek context, the present study contributes to the identified lack of previous quantitative and qualitative data regarding young people's social media practices and their relation to identities and future aspirations. However, it would be useful to conduct a larger research project which would include young people from both rural and urban areas.

To conclude, the present study may open up future avenues for research and encourage the design of larger studies focusing on the intersection of the fields of youth, media and education.

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APPENDICES

I. Glossary of Social Media Terms

Comment: A response which is provided as an answer/reaction to a post on a social media platform.

Follow: If you follow an account/a person on a social media platform, you choose to see what this person posts (= publishes) on their account.

Instant Messaging (IM): A type of real-time communication between two or more people.

Like: To show that you like something posted on a social media platform by clicking on a symbol.

Post: A message or piece of information which you publish on your social media account for other people to see/read.

Status: A piece of information that you publish (especially on Facebook) about yourself.

Tag: A function which allows users to link back to the profiles of other users in an online post.

List of social media platforms mentioned in this study:

Social Media Platform	**Brief Description**
Facebook	Founded in 2004. After registering users can create a profile, add other users as 'friends', post and share content, comment, exchange messages, etc. (www.facebook.com)
Instagram	Founded in 2010. After registering users can create a profile, follow other users, post photos and videos, comment, exchange messages, etc. (www.instagram.com)
YouTube	Founded in 2005. It allows users to create channels in order to view and upload videos, to follow other channels, to comment, etc. (www.youtube.com)
Snapchat	Founded in 2011. It is a multimedia messaging platform. After registering, users can chat and share photos and videos

	which expire after 24 hours. (www.snapchat.com)
Twitter	Founded in 2006. After registering users can post, share and like messages which are restricted to 280 characters and are called *tweets*. (www.twitter.com)
Tumblr	Founded in 2007. After registering users can post and share multimedia content in their blog and follow other users. (www.tumblr.com)
Wattpad	Founded in 2006. Users can write and read user-generated stories and can also interact with other users. (www.wattpad.com)
Amino	Founded in 2011. A network of interest-related communities. Users can explore and share content to an interest-related community and chat with other users. (www.aminoapps.com)
Pinterest	Founded in 2010. Users can browse, share and save content from the world wide web. They can also follow other users. (www.pinterest.com)
Ask.fm	Founded in 2010. Users create profiles and ask questions to other users, anonymously. (https://ask.fm)

II. Questionnaire (Translated in English)

University of Roehampton London

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS

- ★ Please read carefully each question and take as much time as you need to answer it. In some questions you may choose more than one answer, so read carefully each question and the instructions given in each one.
- ★ If you have any queries as you complete the questionnaire do not hesitate to ask for the researcher's help.
- ★ This study is about you and there is not a correct or incorrect way to answer, so it is important to answer each question honestly and to express your opinions.
- ★ No one else will read what you have answered and no one will be able to know your name or who gave these answers!

SECTION A

Questionnaire Number: _____

Male ☐ **Female** ☐ **Age:** _____

SECTION B

- ★ The term "social media platforms" is used in this questionnaire to refer to online platforms such as *Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr, LinkedIn* etc.

1. Do you have an account on a social media platform?

YES ☐ NO ☐

2. If your answer to the above question is YES, go to question 3.
If your answer to the above question is NO, then choose the reason why:

(Please tick as many boxes as needed)

A. I don't know what social media platforms are	☐
B. I am not interested in joining social media platforms	☐
C. I joined before, but I didn't enjoy it	☐
D. List any other reasons here: _____ _____	

1

3. Which of the following social media platforms do you currently have an account with?

(Please tick as many boxes as needed)

A. Facebook	☐
B. Instagram	☐
C. Twitter	☐
D. Snapchat	☐
E. YouTube	☐
F. Tumblr	☐
G. Other (please mention it here):	_____ _____
H. I don't have any social media accounts	☐

4. On a typical week, how often do you use each of the following social media platforms?

	Everyday	5-6 days per week	3-4 days per week	1-2 days per week	Almost never/Never
A. Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Instagram	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Twitter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Snapchat	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. YouTube	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Tumblr	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. Other (please mention it here): _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. On a typical day, how often do you connect to your accounts on the social media platforms that you use the most?

I am almost constantly connected	Several times during the day	Once a day	I do not connect everyday	Almost never/Never
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. Which device do you use to access your social media accounts?

(Please tick as many boxes as needed)

A. PC	☐
B. Laptop	☐
C. Smartphone	☐
D. Tablet	☐
E. None	☐

7. Why do you use social media platforms?

(Please tick as many boxes as needed)

A. To keep in touch with my friends	☐
B. To share videos/photos/songs/articles that I have found online	☐
C. To share my own videos/photos/songs or other content that I have created	☐
D. To find information and read the news	☐
E. To play games	☐
F. To share my experiences	☐
G. To make new friends	☐
H. To share my thoughts and opinions	☐
I. To get opinions about various issues	☐
J. To see what other people are sharing	☐
K. To share my interests	☐
L. I find no reason for using social media	☐
M. I don't use social media platforms	☐
N. Other reasons (please mention briefly here any other reasons for using social media platforms):	

SECTION C

8. How true is this of you? Please tick ONE box on every line.
(1= NOT TRUE**, 2=** A BIT TRUE**, 3=** VERY TRUE**)**

	NOT TRUE	A BIT TRUE	VERY TRUE
A. I use my social media accounts to express aspects of myself.	☐1	☐2	☐3
B. I get inspired about how I imagine myself in the future by things I have seen on social media platforms.	☐1	☐2	☐3
C. My online social media profiles reflect who I am.	☐1	☐2	☐3
D. The social media platforms that I use have helped me discover new interests.	☐1	☐2	☐3

SECTION D

9. How true is this of you? Please tick ONE box on every line.
(1= NOT TRUE**, 2=** A BIT TRUE**, 3=** VERY TRUE**)**

	NOT TRUE	A BIT TRUE	VERY TRUE
A. I want to get into University when I finish school.	☐1	☐2	☐3
B. I have decided the profession/career that I want to pursuit when I finish school.	☐1	☐2	☐3
C. Something that I have seen on social media platforms (profiles/posts/discussions etc.) has made me think about my future career aspirations.	☐1	☐2	☐3

SECTION E
(Please tick ONE box on every line)

10. I have used my accounts on social media platforms to connect to accounts with educational or scientific content (accounts about science/museums/arts/literature etc.).
YES ☐ NO ☐

11. I have used my accounts on social media platforms to get information about or connect to Universities/Colleges (Universities'/Colleges' pages/accounts)
YES ☐ NO ☐

12. I have used my accounts on social media to read the news.
YES ☐ NO☐

SECTION F

Please complete the following information:

Father's Occupation: _____
Father's Ethnicity: _____

Educational Level
(please tick **ONE box**)
Master/PhD Studies ☐
University Studies (BA Degree) ☐
High School ☐
Secondary School ☐
Primary School ☐
I don't know ☐

Mother's Occupation: _____
Mother's Ethnicity: _____

Educational Level
(please tick **ONE box**)
Master/PhD Studies ☐
University Studies (BA Degree) ☐
High School ☐
Secondary School ☐
Primary School ☐
I don't know ☐

★ **Thank you very much for participating in this survey!**

III. Questionnaire (in Greek)

University of Roehampton London

ΕΡΩΤΗΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟ

ΟΔΗΓΙΕΣ ΣΥΜΠΛΗΡΩΣΗΣ

- ★ Παρακαλώ διάβασε προσεκτικά κάθε ερώτηση και πάρε όσο χρόνο χρειάζεσαι για να απαντήσεις. Σε μερικές ερωτήσεις ίσως μπορείς να διαλέξεις περισσότερες από μία απαντήσεις, οπότε δες προσεκτικά τις οδηγίες συμπλήρωσης που βρίσκονται στην παρένθεση δίπλα σε κάθε ερώτηση.
- ★ Εάν έχεις οποιαδήποτε απορία καθώς συμπληρώνεις το ερωτηματολόγιο, μη διστάσεις να ζητήσεις τη βοήθεια της ερευνήτριας.
- ★ Η έρευνα αυτή αφορά τη δική σου άποψη και δεν υπάρχει σωστή ή λανθασμένη απάντηση, οπότε είναι πολύ σημαντικό να απαντήσεις κάθε ερώτηση με ειλικρίνεια και να εκφράσεις ελεύθερα τη σκέψη σου.
- ★ Κανένας άλλος εκτός από την ερευνήτρια δε θα διαβάσει τις απαντήσεις στα ερωτηματολόγια, ούτε θα γνωρίζει κανείς το όνομά σου ή ποιος έδωσε τις απαντήσεις αυτές.

ΜΕΡΟΣ Α

Κωδικός Ερωτηματολογίου: _____

Αγόρι ☐ **Κορίτσι** ☐ **Ηλικία**: _____

ΜΕΡΟΣ Β

- ★ Με τον όρο «πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης» που χρησιμοποιείται σε αυτό το ερωτηματολόγιο, εννοούμε τα Social Media, όπως π.χ. *Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr, LinkedIn* κ. ά..

1. Έχεις κάποιον προσωπικό λογαριασμό σε οποιαδήποτε πλατφόρμα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης;

ΝΑΙ ☐ ΟΧΙ ☐

2. Εάν η απάντησή σου στην παραπάνω ερώτηση είναι ΝΑΙ, τότε πήγαινε στην Ερώτηση 3. Εάν η απάντησή σου στην παραπάνω ερώτηση είναι ΟΧΙ, τότε διάλεξε τον λόγο για τον οποίο δεν έχεις κάποιον λογαριασμό σε πλατφόρμα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης:

(Αν χρειάζεται, μπορείς να επιλέξεις περισσότερα από ένα κουτάκια)

Α. Δε γνωρίζω τι είναι οι πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης	☐
Β. Δε με ενδιαφέρει να έχω κάποιον προσωπικό λογαριασμό στις πλατφόρμες αυτές	☐
C. Είχα φτιάξει κάποιον λογαριασμό παλιότερα αλλά δε μου άρεσε	☐
D. Μπορείς να συμπληρώσεις κάποιον άλλο λόγο αν θες, εδώ: _____ _____	

1

3. Σε ποια/ποιες από τις παρακάτω πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης έχεις δημιουργήσει προσωπικό λογαριασμό;

(Αν χρειάζεται, μπορείς να επιλέξεις περισσότερα από ένα κουτάκια)

A. Facebook	☐
B. Instagram	☐
C. Twitter	☐
D. Snapchat	☐
E. YouTube	☐
F. Tumblr	☐
G. Άλλο (μπορείς να αναφέρεις ποιο είναι εδώ):	_____ _____
H. Δεν έχω λογαριασμό σε καμία πλατφόρμα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης	☐

4. Σε μία εβδομάδα, πόσο συχνά χρησιμοποιείς καθεμία από τις παρακάτω πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης;

	Καθημερινά	5-6 ημέρες την εβδομάδα	3-4 ημέρες την εβδομάδα	1-2 ημέρες την εβδομάδα	Σχεδόν καθόλου/Ποτέ
A. Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. Instagram	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. Twitter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. Snapchat	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. YouTube	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. Tumblr	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. Άλλο (μπορείς να αναφέρεις ποιο είναι εδώ): _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Σε μία ημέρα, πόσο συχνά συνδέεσαι στους προσωπικούς σου λογαριασμούς στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης που χρησιμοποιείς περισσότερο;

Είμαι συνδεδεμένος σχεδόν συνέχεια	Μερικές φορές τη μέρα	Μία φορά τη μέρα	Δε συνδέομαι κάθε μέρα	Σχεδόν ποτέ/Ποτέ
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. Τι συσκευή χρησιμοποιείς για να συνδέεσαι στους προσωπικούς σου λογαριασμούς στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης;

(Αν χρειάζεται, μπορείς να επιλέξεις περισσότερα από ένα κουτάκια)

A. Ηλεκτρονικό Υπολογιστή (PC)	☐
B. Φορητό Υπολογιστή (Laptop)	☐
C. Κινητό τηλέφωνο (Smartphone)	☐
D. Tablet	☐
E. Καμία	☐

7. Γιατί χρησιμοποιείς τις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης;

(Αν χρειάζεται, μπορείς να επιλέξεις περισσότερα από ένα κουτάκια)

A. Για να διατηρώ την επικοινωνία με φίλους μου	☐
B. Για να κοινοποιώ βίντεο/φωτογραφίες/τραγούδια/άρθρα που έχω βρει στο διαδίκτυο	☐
C. Για να κοινοποιώ δικές μου φωτογραφίες/βίντεο/τραγούδια ή άλλο υλικό που έχω δημιουργήσει εγώ	☐
D. Για να βρίσκω πληροφορίες και να ενημερώνομαι	☐
E. Για να παίζω παιχνίδια	☐
F. Για να κοινοποιώ τις εμπειρίες μου	☐
G. Για να κάνω νέους φίλους	☐
H. Για να κοινοποιώ τις σκέψεις και τις απόψεις μου	☐
I. Για να παίρνω απόψεις για διάφορα θέματα	☐
J. Για να βλέπω τι κοινοποιούν οι άλλοι	☐
K. Για να κοινοποιώ τα ενδιαφέροντά μου	☐
L. Δε βρίσκω κανέναν λόγο για να χρησιμοποιώ τις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης	☐
M. Δε χρησιμοποιώ τις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης	☐
N. Άλλοι λόγοι (μπορείς να τους αναφέρεις σύντομα εδώ):	

ΜΕΡΟΣ Γ

8. Σε ποιον βαθμό ισχύουν οι παρακάτω προτάσεις για εσένα; Μπορείς να επιλέξεις ΕΝΑ ΜΟΝΟ κουτάκι για κάθε πρόταση.
(1= Δεν ισχύει καθόλου, **2=** Ισχύει λίγο, **3=** Ισχύει αρκετά**)**

	ΔΕΝ ΙΣΧΥΕΙ ΚΑΘΟΛΟΥ	**ΙΣΧΥΕΙ ΛΙΓΟ**	**ΙΣΧΥΕΙ ΑΡΚΕΤΑ**
A. Χρησιμοποιώ τους προσωπικούς μου λογαριασμούς στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης για να εκφράζω πτυχές του εαυτού μου.	☐1	☐2	☐3
B. Έχω εμπνευστεί από πράγματα που έχω δει από άλλους στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης σχετικά με το πώς φαντάζομαι τον εαυτό μου στο μέλλον.	☐1	☐2	☐3
C. Τα προσωπικά μου προφίλ στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης αντικατοπτρίζουν το ποιος είμαι.	☐1	☐2	☐3
D. Οι πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης που χρησιμοποιώ με έχουν βοηθήσει να ανακαλύψω νέα ενδιαφέροντα.	☐1	☐2	☐3

ΜΕΡΟΣ Δ

9. Σε ποιον βαθμό ισχύουν οι παρακάτω προτάσεις για εσένα; Μπορείς να επιλέξεις ΕΝΑ ΜΟΝΟ κουτάκι για κάθε πρόταση.
(1= Δεν ισχύει καθόλου, **2=** Ισχύει λίγο, **3=** Ισχύει αρκετά**)**

	ΔΕΝ ΙΣΧΥΕΙ ΚΑΘΟΛΟΥ	**ΙΣΧΥΕΙ ΛΙΓΟ**	**ΙΣΧΥΕΙ ΑΡΚΕΤΑ**
A. Θέλω να περάσω στο Πανεπιστήμιο τελειώνοντας το σχολείο.	☐1	☐2	☐3
B. Έχω αποφασίσει το επάγγελμα με το οποίο θέλω να ασχοληθώ τελειώνοντας το σχολείο.	☐1	☐2	☐3
C. Κάτι που έχω δει στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης με έχει κάνει να σκεφτώ πράγματα σχετικά με το μέλλον μου και τις επαγγελματικές μου φιλοδοξίες.	☐1	☐2	☐3

ΜΕΡΟΣ Ε
(Μπορείς να επιλέξεις ΕΝΑ ΜΟΝΟ κουτάκι για κάθε πρόταση)

10. Έχω χρησιμοποιήσει τους λογαριασμούς μου στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης για να ακολουθήσω λογαριασμούς με εκπαιδευτικό ή επιστημονικό περιεχόμενο (λογαριασμοί ή σελίδες σχετικά με επιστήμες/μουσεία/ζωγραφική/λογοτεχνία κ.τ.λ.).

ΝΑΙ ☐ ΟΧΙ ☐

11. Έχω χρησιμοποιήσει τους λογαριασμούς μου στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης για να βρω πληροφορίες για Πανεπιστήμια/Κολλέγια ή για να ακολουθήσω τους λογαριασμούς τους στο διαδίκτυο.

ΝΑΙ ☐ ΟΧΙ ☐

12. Έχω χρησιμοποιήσει τους λογαριασμούς μου στις πλατφόρμες κοινωνικής δικτύωσης για να ενημερωθώ/να διαβάσω τα νέα.

ΝΑΙ ☐ ΟΧΙ ☐

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΣΤ

Παρακαλώ συμπλήρωσε τις παρακάτω πληροφορίες:

Επάγγελμα πατέρα: _____

Εθνικότητα πατέρα:_____

Ανώτατη βαθμίδα εκπαίδευσης στην οποία έχει φοιτήσει (επιλέγεις **ΕΝΑ ΜΟΝΟ κουτάκι**):

Μεταπτυχιακές Σπουδές/Διδακτορικό ☐
Πανεπιστημιακές Σπουδές σε Α.Ε.Ι. / Τ.Ε.Ι. ☐
Λύκειο ☐
Γυμνάσιο ☐
Δημοτικό ☐
Δεν ξέρω ☐

Επάγγελμα μητέρας: _____

Εθνικότητα μητέρας:_____

Ανώτατη βαθμίδα εκπαίδευσης στην οποία έχει φοιτήσει (επιλέγεις **ΕΝΑ ΜΟΝΟ κουτάκι**):

Μεταπτυχιακές Σπουδές/Διδακτορικό ☐
Πανεπιστημιακές Σπουδές σε Α.Ε.Ι. / Τ.Ε.Ι. ☐
Λύκειο ☐
Γυμνάσιο ☐
Δημοτικό ☐
Δεν ξέρω ☐

★ **Σε ευχαριστώ πολύ για τη συμμετοχή σου στην έρευνα!**

IV. Interview Guide Sample (Translated in English)

SECTION A: Warm-up Questions (Estimated Time: 5')

(Researcher introduces herself – Explains confidentiality issues – right to withdraw – recording of interview)

SECTION B: Social Media Practices-Developing Identities online (Estimated time: 15'-20')

- Which are the main social media platforms that you use?
- Which are the main reasons for using each of these platforms?
- Which aspects about yourself do you usually share online? (Interests? Experiences? Opinions? Appearance?)
- Do you usually post content on social media or are you more interested in viewing what other people are sharing? Explain…
- Have you ever seen something on social media platforms that changed the way you see yourself? What was that? Did it change the way you see yourself in a positive or negative way?
- Have you ever seen something on social media platforms that someone else did or posted about and made you think that you would like to do something similar?
- Do you feel that you have learnt something or discovered a skill/interest through your use of social media? If yes, what was that and how did you discover it?
- Have you ever seen something on social media platforms that made you think differently about what you are dreaming/thinking about the future?

SECTION B: Future Educational/Career Aspirations (Estimated time: 15')

- Which are your plans after finishing school?
- How do you imagine yourself after finishing school? What would you like to do?

- Have you decided on a specific profession? Have you thought about your future career?
- How did you decide about your future career aspirations? Have you been inspired from someone/something about your decision? What or whom has influenced your decision? Have you thought of any alternative options?
- Have you ever been inspired about what you want to do in the future by something that you have seen on social media (ex. Facebook, YouTube etc.)?
- Have you ever been discouraged about what you want to do in the future by something that you have seen online on social media (ex. Facebook, YouTube etc.)?
- Have you used social media platforms in order to learn something new?
- Have you used social media platforms about something related to school or lessons/homework?
- Have you used social media platforms to explore your educational or career options?
- Are there any obstacles in imagining your future career? Which are these?

V. Interview Participants

	AGE	GENDER	PARENTAL *ETHNIKOTITA*	PARENTAL EDUCATION	PARENTAL OCCUPATION	SCHOOL
Student 1	16	Boy	Greek Greek	MA/PhD BA	Engineer Software Engineer (IT)	State School 1
Student 2	17	Girl	Greek Greek	BA BA	Engineer Lawyer	State School 1
Student 3	15	Girl	Greek Greek	High School BA	Plumber Nurse	State School 1
Student 4	14	Girl	Albanian Albanian	High School BA	Construction worker Unemployed	State School 1
Student 5	16	Girl	Filipino Filipino	BA BA	Cook Unemployed	State School 1
Student 6	16	Girl	Greek Albanian	I don't know Secondary School	Public Servant Unemployed	State School 1
Student 7	15	Boy	Greek Greek	BA MA/PhD	Teacher Teacher	State School 2
Student 8	14	Girl	Albanian Albanian	High School Secondary School	Construction worker Unemployed	State School 2
Student 9	15	Girl	Albanian Albanian	High School High School	Technician Unemployed	State School 2
Student 10	15	Girl	Greek Greek	I don't know I don't know	Unemployed Unemployed	State School 2
Student 11	15	Girl	Greek Greek	BA High School	Self-employed Accountant	State School 2
Student 12	17	Girl	Greek Greek	BA MA/PhD	Clerk Doctor	State School 2
Student 13	17	Girl	Greek Greek	Secondary High School	Driver Clerk	State School 2
Student 14	15	Girl	Greek Greek	BA BA	Teacher Teacher	State School 3
Student 15	17	Boy	Greek Greek	MA/PhD MA/PhD	Teacher Accountant	State School 3
Student 16	17	Boy	Greek Greek	Secondary High School	Construction worker Public Servant	State School 3
Student 17	17	Boy	Greek Greek	High School BA	Clerk Unemployed	State School 3
Student 18	17	Girl	Greek Greek	High School BA	Unemployed Unemployed	State School 3
Student 19	17	Girl	Greek Greek	Secondary BA	Clerk Teacher	State School 3
Student 20	17	Girl	Greek Greek	BA High School	Accountant Clerk	State School 3
Student 21	17	Girl	Greek Greek	High School BA	Clerk Unemployed	State School 3
Student 22	17	Girl	Greek Greek	BA BA	Public Servant Teacher	State School 3
Student 23	15	Girl	Greek Greek	BA BA	Driver Clerk	State School 3
Student 24	17	Boy	Greek Greek	BA BA	Mechanical Engineer	Private School 1

	AGE	GENDER	PARENTAL *ETHNIKOTITA*	PARENTAL EDUCATION	PARENTAL OCCUPATION	SCHOOL
					Public Servant	
Student 25	15	Girl	Greek Greek	BA BA	Merchandiser Marketing Manager	Private School 1
Student 26	15	Girl	Greek Greek	BA MA	Mechanical Engineer Microbiologist	Private School 1
Student 27	15	Girl	Greek Greek	MA/PhD MA/PhD	Navy Teacher	Private School 1
Student 28	15	Boy	Greek Greek	BA BA	Clerk Clerk	Private School 1
Student 29	15	Boy	Greek Greek	High School High School	Self-employed Unemployed	Private School 1
Student 30	16	Boy	Greek Greek	BA BA	Mechanical Engineer Teacher	Private School 1
Student 31	16	Girl	Greek Greek	BA BA	Self-employed Retired	Private School 1
Student 32	16	Girl	Greek Greek	BA I don't know	- -	Private School 1
Student 33	16	Girl	Greek Greek	MA MA	Biologist Biologist	Private School 1
Student 34	16	Girl	Greek Greek	High School BA	Self-employed Entrepreneur	Private School 1
Student 35	16	Girl	Greek Greek	MA/PhD MA/PhD	Teacher Archaeologist	Private School 2
Student 36	16	Boy	Greek Greek	MA/PhD MA/PhD	Doctor Doctor	Private School 2
Student 37	16	Girl	Greek Greek	I don't know High School	Engineer Unemployed	Private School 2
Student 38	17	Girl	Greek Greek	MA/PhD MA/PhD	Graphic Designer Linguistics Teacher	Private School 2
Student 39	15	Girl	Greek Greek	BA MA/PhD	Military Touristic Management (Hotel Owner/Manager)	Private School 2
Student 40	15	Boy	Greek Greek	MA/PhD MA/PhD	Civil Engineer Lawyer	Private School 2
Student 41	15	Girl	Greek/British Greek	BA MA/PhD	CEO Teacher	Private School 2
Student 42	15	Girl	Greek Greek	Primary School High School	Grocery store assistant Unemployed	State Evening School
Student 43	16	Boy	Greek Greek	I don't know High School	Unemployed Maid	State Evening School
Student 44	17	Boy	Greek Greek	High School High School	Driver Unemployed	State Evening School

	AGE	GENDER	PARENTAL *ETHNIKOTITA*	PARENTAL EDUCATION	PARENTAL OCCUPATION	SCHOOL
Student 45	16	Boy	Greek Greek	I don’t know I don’t know	- -	State Evening School

VI. Ethical Approval

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference EDU 16/ 111 in the Department of Education and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 18.01.17.

VII. Consent Forms

a. Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

I would like to invite you to participate in this project, which aims to study the ways that young people who live in Athens are using online social media platforms (ex. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat etc.) in their everyday lives. Also, I am interested in the ways that young people imagine themselves in the future and their future aspirations.

Who am I?

My name is Myrto Nikolopoulou and I am doing a PhD in Education at the University of Roehampton. I am interested in studying youth, social media and education.

Why am I doing this project?

This project has been designed by me as part of my PhD at the University of Roehampton. It is hoped that the project could provide useful information for the ways young people in Athens use online social media platforms and also about their future educational and career aspirations. By collecting this information, I will explore the opportunities and the risks that exist for youth nowadays. Also, young people will be given the opportunity to express their own views and voices in relation to these issues by participating in the research project.

Why should you participate in this project? 

By participating in this project, you are given an opportunity to address your voice in relation to issues which are relevant to your life, such as the use of online social media platforms and your future aspirations. Your participation is important because it will determine the results of this research and it will also be a unique opportunity for your views to be expressed and be taken into account in the future for the design of innovative educational practices which will be based on your experiences.

What will you have to do if you agree to take part?

1. Return the consent forms (one is for you to sign, one for your parents) so that I know that you are interested to take part in the study.

2. You will be given a small questionnaire to complete in school and return it straight after to me.
3. You might be asked to participate in an interview with me. The interview will include questions about the ways you are using online social media platforms and about your future aspirations. The interview will be audio-recorded, and it will be anonymous. Therefore, your name won't be used or mentioned at any point. The interview will be personal and no one else will have access to the interview process or to the audio-file.
4. When the study is completed, I will produce a summary of the findings which I will be more than happy to send you if you are interested.

How much of your time will your participation involve? 

The completion of the questionnaire won't last more than 10 minutes and if you are invited to an interview it will last approximately 30-40 minutes. Both phases of the project (survey, interview) will be conducted at your school some time during your daily schedule (after arranging the practical details with you and taking the permission of the headmaster of the school).

Will your participation remain confidential? 

No one else apart from me will have access to the answered questionnaires or to the audio-files from the interviews. Your responses to the questions will be used only for the purposes of this project and I will not have access to any of your online or offline personal information. All the interviews will be recorded but they will be anonymous, and I won't use your name or other personal information at any point. You can be reassured that if you take part in the project all of your answers will remain anonymous.

Do you have to take part in the study?

No, your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to give a reason for your decision and you will not be contacted again. Similarly, if you do agree to participate you are free to withdraw at any time during the project if you change your mind.

Researcher: Myrto Nikolopoulou, University of Roehampton, nikolopm@roehampton.ac.uk

b. Participant Consent Form

University of Roehampton London

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: 'Young people's social media practices in Greece: Developing identities online and shaping future aspirations.'

Brief description of research project and what participation involves:

This research aims to explore the ways that young people use online social media platforms and how their online practices relate to the shaping of their identities and their future aspirations. A survey and follow-up interviews with young students from various schools in Athens (14-17 years old) will be carried out in order to explore social media practices, identities and future aspirations. The benefits of this study will be the conclusions about young people's voices with regards to growing up in the digital era which will provide a better understanding of youth and will enable suggestions for the opportunities and risks of using social media platforms in relation to educational contexts.

Details of participation

- *Participation in the Survey*: Students from various schools in Athens will be invited to participate in the survey (in order to achieve a sample of 400) and 30 students will then take part in the interviews. Students will be invited to answer a printed questionnaire which will be distributed to them in their school and which will be returned to the researcher right after completion. The completion of the questionnaire will take 10-15 minutes and it will be distributed to students by the researcher during a school hour with the consent of the school's headmaster. Only the researcher will have access to the completed questionnaires. No data will be shared with any other person and all information will be held and processed only by the researcher, ensuring confidentiality.
- *Participation in the Interviews*: Students who are frequent and active users of social media platforms will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted in the school settings, with the consent of the school's headmaster. They will last for approximately 30 minutes and they will be audio-recorded. All recordings will be kept by the researcher and anonymity will be ensured.
- This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee. The research project is being conducted without a UK DBS check for the researcher but with the Greek equivalent, which is part of the research approval that has been confirmed by the Greek Ministry of Education and the Greek Institute of Educational Policy (IEP).
- Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without the need to justify their decision.

Investigator Contact Details:

Myrto Nikolopoulou

Department of Education

Froebel College

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London

SW15 5PJ

nikolopm@roehampton.ac.uk

+44 (0)7490023209

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and I am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

YES ……

Name …….

Signature ……

Date ……

Please note: As this research project is being organised by a UK University, the normal Greek police Authority procedures cannot be applied as a UK institution cannot be issued with this. IEP and the Ministry of Education will be issued for all relevant procedures. If you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

Director of Studies:

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andrew.stables@roehampton.ac.uk

+44 (0)20 8392 3865

c. Parent Consent Form

University of Roehampton London

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: ‘Young people’s social media practices in Greece: Developing identities online and shaping future aspirations.’

Brief description of research project and what participation involves:

This research aims to explore the ways that young people use online social media platforms and how their online practices relate to the shaping of their identities and their future aspirations. A survey and follow-up interviews with young students from various schools in Athens (14-17 years old) will be carried out in order to explore social media practices, identities and future aspirations. The benefits of this study will be the conclusions about young people’s voices with regards to growing up in the digital era which will provide a better understanding of youth and will enable suggestions for the opportunities and risks of using social media platforms in relation to educational contexts.

Details of participation

- *Participation in the Survey*: Students from various schools in Athens will be invited to participate in the survey (in order to achieve a sample of 400) and 30 students will then take part in the interviews. Students will be invited to answer a printed questionnaire which will be distributed to them in their school and which will be returned to the researcher right after completion. The completion of the questionnaire will take 10-15 minutes and it will be distributed to students by the researcher during a school hour with the consent of the school's headmaster. Only the researcher will have access to the completed questionnaires. No data will be shared with any other person and all information will be held and processed only by the researcher, ensuring confidentiality.
- *Participation in the Interviews*: Students who are frequent and active users of social media platforms will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted in the school settings, with the consent of the school’s headmaster. They will last for approximately 30 minutes and they will be audio-recorded. All recordings will be kept by the researcher and anonymity will be ensured.
- This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton’s Ethics Committee. The research project is being conducted without a UK DBS check for the researcher but with the Greek equivalent, which is part of the research approval that has been confirmed by the Greek Ministry of Education and the Greek Institute of Educational Policy (IEP).
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Investigator Contact Details:

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+44 (0)7490023209

Consent Statement:

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YES ……

Name …….

Signature ……

Date ……

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d. Headmaster Consent Form

University of Roehampton London

HEADMASTER CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: 'Young people's social media practices in Greece: Developing identities online and shaping future aspirations.'

Brief description of research project and what participation involves:

This research aims to explore the ways that young people use online social media platforms and how their online practices relate to the shaping of their identities and their future aspirations. A survey and follow-up interviews with young students from various schools in Athens (14-17 years old) will be carried out in order to explore social media practices, identities and future aspirations. The benefits of this study will be the conclusions about young people's voices with regards to growing up in the digital era which will provide a better understanding of youth and will enable suggestions for the opportunities and risks of using social media platforms in relation to educational contexts.

Details of participation

- *Participation in the Survey*: Students from various schools in Athens will be invited to participate in the survey (in order to achieve a sample of 400) and 30 students will then take part in the interviews. Students will be invited to answer a printed questionnaire which will be distributed to them in their school and which will be returned to the researcher right after completion. The completion of the questionnaire will take 10-15 minutes and it will be distributed to students by the researcher during a school hour with the consent of the school's headmaster. Only the researcher will have access to the completed questionnaires. No data will be shared with any other person and all information will be held and processed only by the researcher, ensuring confidentiality.
- *Participation in the Interviews*: Students who are frequent and active users of social media platforms will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted in the school settings, with the consent of the school's headmaster. They will last for approximately 30 minutes and they will be audio-recorded. All recordings will be kept by the researcher and anonymity will be ensured.
- This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee. The research project is being conducted without a UK DBS check for the researcher but with the Greek equivalent, which is part of the research approval that has been confirmed by the Greek Ministry of Education and the Greek Institute of Educational Policy (IEP).
- Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without the need to justify their decision.

Investigator Contact Details:

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Consent Statement:

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YES ……

Name …….

Signature ……

Date ……

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VIII. Permission to Conduct Research (Greek and translated version)

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ
ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑΣ, ΕΡΕΥΝΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΘΡΗΣΚΕΥΜΑΤΩΝ

ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ
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Αθήνα, 03-11-2016
Αρ. Πρωτ. 185248/Δ2

ΠΡΟΣ:
- **κ. Μυρτώ Νικολοπούλου**
  Ιγνατίου Άρτης 12
  11632 Αθήνα
- **Διεύθυνση Δ/θμιας Εκπ/σης Α΄, Β΄, Γ΄, Δ΄ Αθήνας, Ανατ. Αττικής, Δυτ. Αττικής και Πειραιά**

ΘΕΜΑ: Έγκριση διεξαγωγής έρευνας

Απαντώντας σε σχετική αίτηση, και μετά τη γνωμοδότηση του Ινστιτούτου Εκπαιδευτικής Πολιτικής **(πράξη 42/2016 του Δ.Σ)** σας γνωρίζουμε ότι **ε π ι τ ρ έ π ο υ μ ε** τη διεξαγωγή έρευνας από την **κ. Μυρτώ Νικολοπούλου** κατά τη διάρκεια του σχολικού έτους 2016-2017 με τις εξής προϋποθέσεις:

α) Πριν από την έναρξη της έρευνας να γίνει ενημέρωση του Διευθυντή και του συλλόγου Διδασκόντων των σχολικών μονάδων Δ/θμιας Εκπ/σης, οι οποίες θα συμμετάσχουν στην έρευνα, σχετικά με τη διαδικασία διεξαγωγής της. Η έρευνα να γίνει με τη σύμφωνη γνώμη τους.

β) Η έρευνα να γίνει με την έγγραφη συγκατάθεση των γονέων - κηδεμόνων των μαθητών (για κάθε μαθητή χωριστά). Ο Διευθυντής του σχολείου, αφού αποστείλει στους γονείς-κηδεμόνες προς συμπλήρωση το έντυπο γονικής συναίνεσης που θα του κατατεθεί από την ερευνήτρια και στο οποίο θα περιγράφεται η μεθοδολογία της έρευνας και συγκεντρώσει τα ενυπόγραφα σημειώματα με τη συγκατάθεση των γονέων-κηδεμόνων, μπορεί να συνεχίσει στη διεξαγωγή της έρευνας.

γ) Οι μαθητές να συμπληρώσουν τα ερωτηματολόγια και να συμμετάσχουν στις συνεντεύξεις, **ανώνυμα** και εφόσον το επιθυμούν.

δ) Οι μαθητές να απασχοληθούν μέχρι δύο (02) διδακτικές ώρες.

ε) Η μαγνητοφώνηση των συνεντεύξεων να γίνει αποκλειστικά για τις ανάγκες της συγκεκριμένης έρευνας και το ηχητικό αρχείο, μετά το πέρας της έρευνας, πρέπει να καταστραφεί.

1

στ) Η συγκέντρωση και μελέτη των στοιχείων να γίνουν σύμφωνα με την αρχή προστασίας των δεδομένων προσωπικού χαρακτήρα και δεν θα δημοσιοποιηθούν ευαίσθητα προσωπικά δεδομένα.

Επισημαίνεται ότι η συμμετοχή στην έρευνα δεν είναι υποχρεωτική.

Η έρευνα έχει θέμα: ***«Οι χρήσεις των ηλεκτρονικών μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης από τους νέους στην Ελλάδα: Αναπτύσσοντας ταυτότητες στο διαδίκτυο και διαμορφώνοντας μελλοντικές φιλοδοξίες»***

και απευθύνεται στους μαθητές των σχολικών μονάδων του συνημμένου πίνακα.

Για την πραγματοποίηση της έρευνας θα πρέπει:

1. Οι επισκέψεις στα σχολεία να γίνουν μετά από συνεννόηση με το Διευθυντή του και σε συνεργασία με το σύλλογο καθηγητών, ώστε να μην παρεμποδίζεται η ομαλή διεξαγωγή των μαθημάτων.

2. Τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας μετά την ολοκλήρωσή της να αποσταλούν στο Ινστιτούτο Εκπαιδευτικής Πολιτικής (Αν. Τσόχα 36, 11521 Αθήνα) σε ηλεκτρονική μορφή.

3. Οι Διευθυντές των Διευθύνσεων Δ/θμιας Εκπ/σης Α΄, Β΄, Γ΄, Δ΄ Αθήνας, Ανατ. Αττικής, Δυτ. Αττικής και Πειραιά να ενημερώσουν σχετικά τους Διευθυντές των σχολείων αρμοδιότητάς τους, ώστε να διευκολύνει την ενδιαφερόμενη στην πραγματοποίηση της έρευνας αυτής σύμφωνα με τα παραπάνω.

Ο ΓΕΝΙΚΟΣ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΑΣ

ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ Δ. ΠΑΝΤΗΣ

Συν.: 02 σελ.

Εσωτ. Διανομή
- Γρ. Γενικού Γραμματέα
- Δ/νση Σπουδών, Προγρ/των & Οργάνωσης Δ.Ε. Τμ. Α΄

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF STUDIES, CURRICULUM AND ORGANISATION IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
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Classification level:
To be kept until:
Priority level:

Athens, 03-11-2016
Ref. no.: 185248/Δ2

TO:

- **Mrs Myrto Nikolopoulou**
  12 Ignatiou Artis str.
  11632 Athens
- **Directorates of Secondary Education in all following areas: A', B', C', D' of Athens, East Attica, West Attica and Piraeus**

SUBJECT: Permission for conducting research

In response to the relevant application and after receiving the consultation provided by the Institute of Educational Policy **(Ref.no. 42/2016)**, we inform you that we **allow** Mrs **Myrto Nikolopoulou** to conduct research, during the academic year 2016-2017, under the following conditions:

a) Before the start of the research project, all teachers and headmasters of the participating schools should be informed about the process of the research. The research process should begin after ensuring the agreement of the schools' headmasters to participate.

b) The research should be conducted after getting the informed parental consent, in a written format, for each participant. The headmaster of each school after administrating and collecting the parental consent forms (the forms will be provided by the researcher and will include all relevant methodological details), he can then continue with the conduction of the research.

c) The students will answer the questionnaires and will participate in the interviews **anonymously** and only if they agree to participate.

d) The participation of the students in the research project should not exceed the duration of two (02) teaching hours.

e) The recorded interview files should be used exclusively for the purpose of this research project and after the completion of this project the files should be destroyed.

f) The collection and analysis of the research data should be conducted in accordance with the personal data protection guidelines and no piece of sensitive personal data should be publicised.

It is highlighted that participation in this research project is not compulsory.

The title of the research project is: ***"Young people's social media online practices in Greece: Developing identities online and shaping future aspirations."*** and it is aimed at the students of the schools which are included in the table that was attached to the researcher's application.

The following guidelines should be taken into account for the conduction of the research:

1. The school visits should commence after contacting the headmaster of each school and in cooperation with the teaching staff so that the visits do not interfere with the school schedule.
2. After the completion of the research project, the conclusions should be sent in a digital format to the Institute of Educational Policy (38 An. Tsoxa str., 11521, Athens).
3. The managers of the Directorates of Secondary Education in all following areas: A', B', C', D' of Athens, East Attica, West Attica and Piraeus should inform accordingly the headmasters of the schools in their areas in order to facilitate the researcher in conducting this research project.

SECRETARY GENERAL

IOANNIS D. PANTIS

CERTIFICATION Concerning the attached document, the undersigned lawyer certifies the accuracy of the translation from GREEK to ENGLISH, in accordance with Article 36, Paragraph 2c' of the Code of Lawyers (law4194/2013). Athens, 9.1.2017 The lawyer	I certify that the attached document is a true and faithful copy of the original and it has been translated from GREEK to ENGLISH by me today, in accordance with Article 36, Paragraph 2c' of the Code of Lawyers (law 4194/2013). Athens, 9.1.2017 The lawyer
MARIA G. TZAGAKI **LAWYER** **R.N.: 35447** **T.I.N.: 149955132 , P.F.S: VIRONAS** **2, AGIAS VARVARAS str., VIRONAS** **PHONE: (0030)210 7600312, (0030)6940873205**	**MARIA G. TZAGAKI** **LAWYER** **R.N.: 35447** **T.I.N.: 149955132 , P.F.S: VIRONAS** **2, AGIAS VARVARAS str., VIRONAS** **PHONE: (0030)210 7600312, (0030)6940873205**

IX. Interview Transcript Sample

Student 6 (Female, Greek/Albanian, State School 1)

I: So, which social media platforms do you use?

ST6: I mostly use Wattpad, Facebook and YouTube. I also use Instagram and Snapchat.

I: Do you have an account on all the platforms you mentioned?

ST6: Yes, I have my own account on YouTube as well. Me and three friends of mine, we started a YouTube channel, but we haven't uploaded our own videos yet. But we are planning to do it. These girls are friends of mine from school. On Wattpad I have a profile as well and I am currently writing my own novel. I use Wattpad more often than any other platform, then I use Facebook and YouTube comes third.

I: Would you like to talk a bit more about Wattpad because it is the platform that I know less about? Is it a platform where you can write and share your own novels?

ST6: Yes, sure! It is a platform where you can write various stuff, novels, books, stories. You can also insert photographs, you can even find samples of CVs, everything, anything you like. Basically, it is something like Facebook, meaning that everyone can post stuff, but on this platform you cannot see who reads or sees your posts, it is totally anonymous. You can comment, and you can put a star to show that you like something, this is similar to 'Like' on Facebook. You can also use some reminders on the Chapters you are reading so that you don't get lost. In general, this is a place where kids can break free, because you feel free in there. I mean, nobody knows nothing about you, they don't know who you are and it is not easy for someone to find out who you are.

I: So you don't have any personal information about you on your Wattpad profile?

ST6: This depends on you, it is your choice. Personally, I haven't included any personal information about me. When you are in there you can escape reality and you can express yourself more freely without anyone judging or criticising you. To put it briefly, it doesn't have any rules.

I: How did you start using Wattpad? How did you find out about it?

ST6: I found about Wattpad through an advertisement on Playstore, through my smartphone and it caught my attention and I decided to try it and explore it.

I: So, do you usually use your smartphone to connect to it?

ST6: Yes, mostly I use my smartphone. I only use a PC if I want to write.

I: What do you like most about Wattpad? Why do you use it more than the other social media platforms?

ST6: Because I would say that it is the one platform where I feel that I can express myself more. What I like the most is that in there, there are kids that they don't have anything to do with what older people think about teens, there are kids that express themselves in ways that no one would expect, as if they are professional writers and I also like that I can feel exactly how the main characters feel, because I can relate to them. I have learnt much more things about life through these stories than through my everyday life.

I: Regarding all social media platforms that you use, do you usually use them in order to post stuff or to view what other people are posting?

ST6: I usually view what other people are posting, but mostly I use them to talk to others. But if I feel the need, if something is bothering me, if there is something that I would like to share, or to make something clear to someone, then I will post about it and I will explain it there.

I: Do you mean that this might be a personal view about a social issue or about a personal one?

ST6: Yes, both, about different issues. It might be about something that I am thinking about at that moment and I feel the need to write about it, then I will write it there, in a post.

I: What do you usually post about yourself on social media?

ST6: I post my thoughts, things that I am thinking about. Stuff that I have in my mind and I avoid keeping them inside me for a long time.

I: Can you give me an example?

ST6: Sure. A couple of days ago I posted on Facebook a status saying: “Don’t be afraid of the monsters that live under your bed, be afraid of those that live on top of it.”. And I think that this is not something difficult to understand. And it is also something real, that anyone could understand.

I: Why did you decide to post this?

ST6: Good question. It might seem funny but I was watching ‘Scooby Doo’, yes (laughs), and I thought that every single thing that we watch on TV, either animated films or movies, it has a message and something to learn. Isn’t that true? And Scooby Doo taught us that behind all monsters, there are humans, people. So, that’s what led me to post this thing that I thought.

I: And why did you want to share this thought on social media in particular?

ST6: Because if you tell this to someone orally, they won’t pay attention, and you can neither say this to many people to see it and understand it. But on social media anyone can see it and much more people will pay attention to it.

I: OK, so it was a thought about something you watched on TV and you wanted to share it with more people so they can see it and think about it too.

ST6: Yes, exactly.

I: You mentioned something earlier in our discussion, but I wanted to ask you whether you have seen something on social media that made you think differently about yourself or to change a personal view of yours about something? You mentioned earlier about using Wattpad, that it has made you think differently about stuff..

ST6: Sure, I believe for everyone there has been a time in your life that you need to look like or become like someone else. It can either be a celebrity or a person we know from our everyday life, so you might even do something silly to be more like this person. It can be about the way this person talks or looks or anything. So, yes, when I was younger it has happened to me to do that. Maybe someone had a certain interest or hobby and I would do the same. I have done that and now that I am thinking about me behaving like this I wonder why I did it. And I realise that I am more mature now. Now it doesn't happen to me. I am who I am, and this is what I will show, I won't hide anything. And on social media I post what expresses myself.

I: Has anything that you have seen on social media changed the way you see yourself?

ST6: Yes, many times. I might see a post on Facebook or on YouTube or on another app which is called Ask.fm. I have seen things on this platform that people have written about me and I might see things which make me reflect and think about whether I had a wrong opinion about something. I might reconsider a view about me or about someone else or an issue.

I: You mentioned that on Ask.fm they have written things about you, can you explain that a bit more? Was it something positive or negative?

ST6: Mostly negative, because before coming to this school other people didn't like me much and I was trying to change myself to please them. Something that I stopped doing and I decided that whoever wants to accept who I am, will accept it for who I am.

I: Have you seen other people doing something on social media that made you think that you want to do something similar or which changed your view on something?

ST6: It just made me think that some people who you might see them all happy and laughing on social media and they seem as if they are the happiest person in a group of friends, but deep inside they are the loneliest person you have ever met.

I: You mean that they present a 'fake' or different image of themselves on social media?

ST6: Yes. It is a mask that surely many teens use. They don't want to look weak, they want to show that they can make it on their own despite all the pressure, the bullying that is an issue nowadays and whichever problem a teen might be facing.

I: Do you feel that you have learnt something new by using social media?

ST6: Every single day!

I: Can you give me an example?

ST6: I have learnt a lot of things but mainly I have learnt things about how people are. I have learnt that people have lost their honesty. We escape truth by hiding behind screens, this is how life is now. In there we can show our superiority to someone else who is weaker than us, something that we wouldn't do face-to-face, we wouldn't have the courage to do it.

I: So, you mean that some kids use social media to…

ST6: They don't have to face the consequences of their actions. Because we have a whole life to live ahead of us, but we escape it and spend more time on social media

and we let time pass, we let the days pass because we are focused on something that we do in there.

I: Have you discovered a new interest by using social media?

ST6: First of all, by using YouTube I discovered how much I love music and singing, I started to sing and I really like that. Then I started writing some poems and stories. I started writing my own novel now. This happened because of Wattpad. If I haven't been on Wattpad I wouldn't have realised that I have a talent in writing or that I love writing. So, all this has a positive side as well.

I: When you started writing on Wattpad were you interested if other users, your audience, would like your poems or stories? Did you post on Wattpad your poems and stories?

ST6: To give you an example to understand better, the novel I am writing on Wattpad doesn't include any information about me, it is completely anonymous. They don't know my name or my age and I write stuff that I have in mind and I want to express. In the description of my novel I mention that through my novel I want to help and encourage other kids who share the same emotions and fears. And from what I have noticed this helps indeed and it has an effect. And this makes me feel happy.

I: So, is there communication with others? People who read your stories send you messages and say their opinion about your novel?

ST6: Yes, this can happen, and it has happened.

I: Do you like this communication? Are you interested if others will read your stories and if they will respond to it or are you interested in writing stories just because you want to express your thoughts?

ST6: No, I mainly wrote in order to help other people so yes, that's my main purpose and I feel happy when I see this happening.

I: Earlier you mentioned about your YouTube channel that you are planning to upload content. Have you thought of what this content will be?

ST6: Yes, the other girls had some basic ideas, such as make-up, fashion tips, vlogs, hacks, etc. But I thought that I am not so interested in all these, so I will do two other things. Song covers and general discussions, opinions about various things, anything.

I: How do you imagine that these discussions will be?

ST6: Surely in order to become known to others and for others to understand your way of thinking you have to touch an issue which is important, serious. And when you get responses and reactions you will then discuss issues that the audience, the people ask from you. Probably they will need help. And about the other things that the other girls will do, I will not be the right person to contribute because these are not things that I know of, I haven't spent any time on these things.

I: Regarding Wattpad, do you prefer reading stories just in there or do you also like to read published, printed books as well?

ST6: I like to read normal, printed books as well but what I like about Wattpad is that each person who writes a story in there is putting a part of themselves in it. On Wattpad people don't write their novels with the aim to earn money, but because they love what they do. That's the difference with an author who will get paid to write a book. I prefer reading novels on Wattpad, because I prefer whatever is real. So, I will go there to read, because in there, there will be people like me.

I: What do you like most about social media?

ST6: What I enjoy the most is that I get lost in there, but I feel that I can be myself without having someone criticising me or without me caring about what other people might say about me. In enjoy that I can do things which I cannot do in my everyday life and I feel more carefree.

I: Can you explain the things you can do on social media which you cannot do in your everyday life?

ST6: To communicate with my friends constantly, this is something which you cannot do in your everyday life of course. To listen to music, to watch videos and all this stuff, even to write and to view what other people are doing, what other people post. These are things you can only do on social media.

I: According to your point of view, which is the most positive attribute of social media platforms?

ST6: Freedom.

I: Is this about what you described before? The freedom to express yourself?

ST6: Yes.

I: Have you shared your love about writing with your family? Do they know about it?

ST6: They know that I like it, but obviously they don't know that I have an account on social media about it. It's not that I want to hide this from them, I don't want that, obviously. It is just that I don't think they are in a position to get it, to understand. Because OK, they have also been teenagers but not in this generation.

I: You mean that they might believe it is a bad thing to use social media?

ST6: They will not understand the reason, or they would say 'why do you think in this way, kid? Why do you have these thoughts? Talk to us!'. This is what I want to avoid, I want to keep it just for me.

I: I am going to ask you now about your future plans. Have you decided what you would like to do after finishing school?

ST6: The things that I have read in Wattpad and the interactions with other people have influenced my decision to study Psychology. By reading various books on Wattpad I started wondering whether all people could think in this way, if they can change their emotions and way of thinking. And this created a query about how the human mind is thinking so I decided to study Psychology.

I: Nice, so you want to enter University to study Psychology and then to work as a Psychologist?

ST6: Yes, exactly.

I: So, the things you have read on Wattpad were the stimuli to take this decision?

ST6: Yes, yes.

I: Is there anything else which contributed to making this decision?

ST6: To influenced my decision... hmm… Initially it was through Wattpad that I realised that I am interested in studying Psychology as I explained already. But what also influenced my decision is that every person has been through some rough experiences in their life and I must admit that despite my age I have been through several difficult experiences as well. So, I would like to help other people who could be helped and may have been through similar experiences, so this is my biggest motivation. Many students would say that they get advice from their parents when they make decisions about such things, I will say that the only person I trust and whose opinion matters to me is my best friend. She has been on my side as if she was my sister for many years and I take her advice about everything.

I: You explained to me how using Wattpad has contributed to your decision, is there anything about social media which has discouraged you when you think about your future plans?

ST6: Hmm… I wouldn't say so. I wouldn't rely on something I saw on social media about such an important decision about my future because in there you may find many fake things, many lies. Even in the news on Facebook there are lies, so I think what has discouraged me is the situation of Greece, which is not at its best financially. So this has put me into a lot of thinking, but I don't intend in letting it affect me and feel bad.

I: Have you used social media to explore aspects related to your future plans?

ST6: I have searched books about Psychology, I don't follow pages online. I was the person who used to believe that most psychologists, not all, don't really pay attention to helping others and care more about the payment they will get. That's why I didn't used to like the idea of becoming a psychologist. But then I thought about it over and over and I said that I will have my own purpose and I will follow it regardless of what other people are doing.

I: Do you think that there is an obstacle about achieving your future plans?

ST6: There are two things. Firstly, I have to improve my school grades, that's true. And the other thing is the Greek economy.

I: Have you used social media about something related to school?

ST6: Everyone has done this. To discuss with schoolmates, to find information.

I: I am afraid we are running out of time. Thank you very much for this discussion and your participation!

ST6: Thank you!

X. Qualitative Analysis: List of Themes and Codes

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Types of social media practices	-Communicational	-Chat/Instant messaging -Communicate with friends -Talk to friends -Communicate with new people/meet new people -Join online groups -Participate in online group discussions
	-Supporting and expanding interests	-Browse content (photos/videos/articles…) related to interests -Chat with people who share the same interests -Join online communities/groups -See friends' interests
	-Creative expression	-Taking/editing/posting photographs -Creating/editing/posting videos -Writing/posting stories/poems -Sharing drawings
	-Content curation and content consumption	-Watching videos -Listening to music -Reading articles -Posting photos/videos/music/articles/news -Sharing photos/videos/music/articles/news of others -Check-in -Reading the opinions of others -Posting personal views/opinions
	-Differentiation of uses	-Different practices on each social media platform -Different privacy settings on each social media platform -Different audiences on each social media platform
Identity performance on social media	-Self-presentation	-Posting personal photographs -Posting personal interests -Posting personal opinions -Posting personal moments of my everyday life -My profiles do not represent fully who I really am
	-'Real' vs. 'fake' self-presentation: impression	-People present their 'real' selves online

	management	-People present ‘polished’ selves online -People present ‘fake’ selves online
Developing identities through social media engagement	Developing: -Self-consciousness	-Conscious about my physical appearance -My body is not nice compared to bodies I see on social media -Viewing content about body positivity/acceptance
	-Peer and emotional support	-I share my thoughts/feelings with peers -Inspirational quotes make me feel better
	-Social comparison	-‘Their lives must be better’
	-Conformity	-‘You feel you have to do what everyone else is doing’
	-Diversity	-‘It changes the way you see others’ -‘It changed my viewpoints’ -‘You see different things, you wouldn’t have seen offline’ - Became interested in social issues
	-Social skills	-Became more sociable -Gained confidence -Became more popular
	-Learning	-Learnt about the world -Learnt about activities (sports/drawing…) -Learning things by watching DIY videos -Learning things by watching TedX videos
Participants’ views on positive aspects of social media engagement	-Ease of communication	-Cheap way to communicate -You can communicate any time
	-Getting information	-You can get informed
	-Freedom	-Freedom of self-expression -No rules -No criticism
	-Agency	-I choose which platforms to use -I choose how to express myself
	-Having an audience	-You can show something about you to others -People see your posts
Participants’ views on negative aspects of social media engagement	-Freedom	-No rules
	-Hateful content	-Hateful/racist comments/content -Bullying -Negativity -Harsh criticism

	-Addiction	-It makes you spend too much time -You get addicted
	-Over-sharing	-Some people post too much/too often -Some people show off
	-Privacy concerns	-Personal information become public
Types of future aspirations	-Continuing to Higher Education	-Planning to attend University -Studying at a specific University Department -Studying a specific field -University studies as a pre-requisite to a professional career -Attending University is a 'dream' -Attending University as an obvious choice -Attending University as a first step of a detailed career plan
	-Attending Vocational College	-Planning to attend Vocational College
	-Applying for a semi-skilled/unskilled manual job	-Planning to apply for a job
Factors influencing future aspirations	-Family	-Following parental advice -Following a family member's profession
	-Academic performance	-School grades -Panhellenic examination performance
	-Job security	
	-Earning money	
	-Personal interests	
	-Life experiences	-Out-of-school activities -School activities
	-School counselling	
	-'It suits me'	-I can imagine myself as… -It is a profession that suits my personality
Perceived obstacles to achieving future aspirations	-Greek context	-Economic crisis -High rate of unemployment
	-School performance	
	-Personal effort	
	-Financial problems	
	-'There are no obstacles'/'You can achieve anything if you try'	
Social media practices	-Instrumental uses	-Following University/College

influencing future aspirations		social media accounts -Exploring content about future plans on social media -Finding events/seminars/educational activities -Subscribing to accounts and mailing lists -Seeing other people's professional activity on social media
	-Social media practices reinforcing aspirations	-Watching videos and posts of established professionals in certain fields -Participating in online discussions -Reading online posts -Following pages of organisations
	-Discussing 'success'	-'You can achieve anything if you work hard' -'You can make it if you really want it' -Examples of 'self-made' people seen on social media -Aspiring to a lifestyle as this is seen on social media

XI. Additional tables

Parental Ethnikotita of Questionnaire Participants

FATHER		MOTHER	
	n (%)		**n (%)**
Greek	381 (82.3%)	**Greek**	375 (81%)
Albanian	43 (9.3%)	**Albanian**	49 (10.6%)
Filipino	8 (1.7%)	**Filipino**	8 (1.7%)
Bulgarian	2 (0.4%)	**Russian**	3 (0.6%)
Georgian	2 (0.4%)	**American**	2 (0.4%)
Cypriot	2 (0.4%)	**Bulgarian**	2 (0.4%)
Egyptian	2 (0.4%)	**Armenian**	1 (0.2%)
Australian	1 (0.2%)	**British**	1 (0.2%)
British	1 (0.2%)	**Cypriot**	1 (0.2%)
German	1 (0.2%)	**Georgian**	1 (0.2%)
Romanian	1 (0.2%)	**Nigerian**	1 (0.2%)
Serbian	1 (0.2%)	**Romanian**	1 (0.2%)
Sudanese	1 (0.2%)	**Sudanese**	1 (0.2%)
Swiss	1 (0.2%)	**Ukrainian**	1 (0.2%)
Missing	16 (3.5%)	**Missing**	16 (3.5%)
Total	463 (100%)	**Total**	463 (100%)