

# **The Role of Perceptions of Risk and Trust in Family Practices Around Social Media Technologies**

**Katya Danielova Bozukova**

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at

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Katya Danielova Bozukova, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

## Acknowledgements

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## **Abstract**

The role of social media technologies in family life, particularly in the lives of children, has been a growing part of academic and public discourse in the United Kingdom (Adams, 2019; Savage, 2019). Perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies have been at the forefront of that discussion, with children being conceptualised as “digital natives”, having a fundamentally different relationship with technology than their parents, the “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2009).

This thesis will use qualitative methods to explore the role of perceptions of risk and trust in family practices around social media. It will examine, firstly, the extent to which differential perceptions of risk and trust can be detected between parents and children in families living in the UK. Secondly, if differential perceptions cannot be detected, it will explore what other factors influence the family practices around social media technologies. The main argument is that there is not enough evidence to suggest a generational divide between parents and children as far as perceptions of social media go. However, there are other factors detected that influence the ways in which families approach social media, such as peer pressure, fear of exclusion, and the need for social capital. This thesis will argue that there is a need for an urgent revision of the discourse around social media, and risk, in order to prepare children for life in the digital world.

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# Introduction

Risk and trust and the relationship between these concepts are central to understanding how families engage with social media technologies. Yet, despite academic findings to the contrary (Helsper and Eynon, 2010) the conversation in schools and in policy has not moved further than the notion of children as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001; NSPCC, 2015) whose behaviour the parents can only control (Tait, 2015). The gap between academic and social discourse has led to many issues, both in practice and in theory.

This research project focuses on perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies, and the practices of families with children in the United Kingdom. Using qualitative methods, it examines the practices of UK-based families (11 families, or 38 individuals) around social media technologies, as well as the practices of stakeholders involved in their lives (schools and community centres). It will argue that, while individual families’ practices focus on mitigating some of the risks family members encounter online, they are not enough to negate the consequences of poor online practices by their wider social circle.

While the thesis uses the lens of “risk society” (Beck & Ritter, 1992; Giddens, 1991) to examine the ways in which perceptions of risk and trust are conceptualised by family members, it also examines risk society critically. The weakness of the theory in examining the family environment will be highlighted and explored in order to generate a better understanding of how risk is produced by children on social media; and what systemic failures might enable that risk creation. Some of the main contributions of this thesis are about insider threat in the family context, and how some of the theories of insider threat can cross-over from the information security field into the one of family practices.

## **1. Aims and Objectives**

This research project is part of the Magna Carta Doctoral Centre at Royal Holloway, which focuses its efforts on the rights and liberties of the individual in the digital age. Within the context of perceptions of the thesis, this means looking at how families navigate digital spaces and social media devices; what threats family members have to face; and what support systems the family

has access to in dealing with risk and trust online. Special attention will be paid to threats not widely discussed in the literature – insider threats, threats from trusted adults and threats from authority figures.

The aims of this thesis are to look at how perceived risk and trust impact upon the usage of social media technologies in the family, and to explore the factors that influence said perceptions. The objectives are to contribute to the growing scholarship surrounding the sociology of technology by examining the mechanisms by which individuals are driven to social media in the first place, and what keeps them engaged (Lupton, 1999).

There have been many studies done on social media and children (Boyd, 2014), as well as social media and family life (Livingstone, Haddon, & Gorzig, 2012; Wajcman, 2015). Much has also been written on the topic of “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2009) and whether the idea of such “generationalism” holds up to critical examination (Helsper and Eynon, 2010; Jones, 2010; Taneja, Wu and Edgerly, 2018). While generational gaps in technology use are at the heart of current policy (Department for Education, 2018; United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, 2019), the main contributions of this thesis revolve around what family members have in common instead – mistrust in technology, trust in friends, anxiety about the lack of support they perceive themselves to have. In focusing on the family practices, this thesis looks beyond the “generational gap” and builds on existing research, to expand theories on risk and trust in social media technologies.

## **2. Research Questions**

This project will focus on answering the following questions:

1. Within the context of families living in the United Kingdom, to what extent can we detect differential perceptions of risk and trust in social media usage amongst different generations of family members?

2. What are the key factors influencing social media practices within the family?

While it was initially believed that “generationalism” (Crichter, 2011, Mainsah, Brandtzæg, & Følstad, 2016; Taneja et al., 2018) would be the cornerstone of this research project,

both literature (Helsper and Eynon, 2010) and the primary data have shown that the usage of social media with respect to risk and trust is more complex. Indeed, this thesis will argue that family members engage with each other in order to collaborate on satisfying and safe social media usage. There is an inherent dynamism to the relationship, in that it is evolving and changing alongside the technology itself – a dynamism which tends to be missing from both literature and practice.

### **3. Thesis Overview**

With family practices at the heart of this thesis, the literature review will start with an overview of the sociological perspectives of families (Smart, 2010; Harman and Cappellini, 2015), and digital parenting (Valcke et al., 2010a) and the challenges faced by parents in managing their children's usage of social media (United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, 2019). The chapter will then move onto an overview of the literature surrounding risk society (Beck & Ritter, 1992; Giddens, 1991), the role of trust in online interactions (Whitty and Joinson, 2008) and the two main risks associated with children and social media – namely, cyberbullying and online grooming (Megahn Meier Foundation, 2007; NSPCC, 2015). Finally, the chapter will examine some of the literature around loneliness (Laing, 2016), and social capital (Urry, 2012; Eynon and Helsper, 2015), in order to better understand the mechanisms by which family members might engage with social media.

With the literature review in mind, Chapter Two will lay out the methodological approach to answering the research questions. It will begin with the ontological and epistemological stance taken when approaching the project and explaining the rationale behind choosing qualitative methods. Having assumed a social constructivist stance, the chapter will then also address the positionality of the researcher and the role it will play during the fieldwork, as this could impact the kinds of data that are gathered. The chapter will touch on some of the pilot projects undertaken, before ending with the final research design, which are family group interviews combined with a vignette-type game.

Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six will present the findings from the family group interviews.

Chapter Three will answer the first research question of this thesis, by focusing on the intergenerational aspect of family practices toward risk and trust on social media. The chapter will confirm the findings of previous theory (Helsper and Eynon, 2010; Eynon and Helsper, 2015) that “generation” by itself is not a predictor of social media prowess or risk-tolerance. Other factors that appeared to impact the participants’ usage and perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies were identified. Those factors were: perceived pleasure, perceived usefulness, peer pressure, insider threats, and the role of trust within the family. Each of these, and the way they relate to each other, will be examined in the subsequent chapters, as part of answering the second question of this thesis.

Chapter Four will focus on the first two factors shaping family practices: perceived pleasure and perceived usefulness derived from the usage of social media technologies. The researcher will argue that the themes of pleasure and usefulness are interconnected in the data, and that, moreover, they help fill some of the gaps in current sociology of technology theory. Current theory of social media tends to overlook pleasure altogether, ignoring an avenue of risk production and trivialising its importance. As such the chapter adds to the theory in exploring the interplay between pleasure and usefulness in how social media is adopted by families.

Chapter Five will build on those findings, by looking at insider threats and how they drive social media usage. The chapter will focus on peer pressure as an influencing factor to be on social media, and responses to different kinds of threats. While stranger danger and cyberbullying occupy a central role in current theory around social media and children, the chapter will focus on dangerous communities. This chapter is where Beck’s risk society (1992) is not helpful in theoretically conceptualising the data, as risk appears to come more from inside the community than from the outside. The chapter’s main contribution is illustrating the role of familiarity and social etiquette in allowing threats to grow and proliferate.

Chapter Six will look at risk-reduction practices of participants and argue that trust is an essential component in both individual and group practice. The researcher uses the chapter to explore the ways in which children acted as their own gatekeepers through their practices. The chapter will also look at how parents engaged in hidden gatekeeping – or, attempts to control their children’s online environments in an indirect way. The focus on self-gatekeeping and hidden gatekeeping will then lead into the chapter’s main discussion on the role of trust in family practices.

The chapter will demonstrate the importance of trust and goodwill in the families with regard to the amount of control exerted by parents over their children. It will end with a discussion on the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

Finally, chapter seven will present a discussion, summarising the findings of the project, its limitations, returning to the wider aims of the Leverhulme project, and the Magna Carta doctoral school, and how this project's findings contribute to the discussion of digital rights and liberties in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chapter will compare findings against the literature to identify venues for future research, regarding the practical implications of the findings for both individual families and policy-makers. The thesis will end by circling back to Ulrich Beck's risk society theory (Beck and Ritter, 1992) and presenting risk society in the digital context, arguing that while risk society works as a macro theory, it does not work entirely when applied to the micro context of a family.

#### **4. Guide to terminology**

There are several key terms in this thesis that will be referred to often and which are worth clarifying from the outset. While these are not by far the only definitions, this is how the following terms have been defined for the purposes of this thesis:

“Social Media Technologies” is a branch of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) that allow users to get in touch with their respective social networks in real time. The definition includes both the programming that makes it possible to run various platforms and supporting apps (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, email, Messenger, Viber, Whatsapp, etc.) and the devices required to access these platforms (laptops, personal computers, telephones, and WiFi.) Though the phrase social media is used to describe platforms of mass public communication like blogs and networking sites, this thesis adopts a broader perspective, including technologies meant for private interactions, such as email and private messaging.

“Social Networking Platforms/ Social Networking Sites (SNS)” are any online platform that allows users to participate in virtual public life. They can be accessed from stationary computers as well as through various applications on mobile devices.

“Apps” is short for applications, or pieces of software that allow a particular social networking site to run from a mobile device. During the fieldwork, many of the younger

participants used “apps” and “social networking platforms” interchangeably, which is why in the empirical chapters, these terms are used in a similar way. “Apps” are how the children most often accessed social media technologies.

“Family” is a contested term, one that is often loaded with political and religious meaning. Most research surrounding children’s online habits (Valcke et al., 2010a; Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig, 2012) focuses on the nuclear family, and the parenting styles of heterosexual couples. However, various households use social media technologies – not just traditional nuclear families – and in each of those households, members have a role to play in shaping each other’s social media usage. For this reason, this thesis will focus on studying “family practices”, not as a monolith but as a set of habits and actions associated with the family and the ways in which the family moves through the world as a unit (Morgan, 2011).

“Boundaries” is a term that is used in the context of this thesis to mean a set of behaviours that are adopted in response to behaviour that is acceptable or not acceptable to the individual holding them. Brené Brown explains them in *Rising Strong* as: “our lists of what is okay and what is not okay” (Brown, 2015., p. 126). Brown’s research is one of the main sources for this thesis’ methodology and how the researcher approached the topic of risks from within the social circle (Brown, 2015, 2017), and the concept of “boundaries” was one that was used often in interviews when discussing online abuse and cyberbullying with children.

Finally, it is worth making a note on the term “perception” and what it is used to describe in this thesis. While there are many definitions of “perception” that are exclusive to different academic disciplines, here, the term is used to describe the way in which something is seen, or understood, or interpreted. This definition includes intuitive understanding, but also lived (relational) experience and theoretical knowledge.

In addition to featuring in the data to an extensive degree, the terms above will also be important when examining the data gathered for this project. It is important to understand their relevance both as theoretical constructs of their own right, as well as useful shorthand, as this thesis employs them to a significant degree. The origin of these terms, as well as the discussion of other theoretical themes relevant to this project, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter One: Literature review**

This chapter will examine the literature surrounding the main themes of this research project. It will start with an examination of sociological perspectives on family, the ways in which social media has changed parenting and perceptions of parenting, and the risks associated with children's usage of social media. It will then move onto literature surrounding the culture of connectivity, and what drives the usage of social media, despite the known risks. Finally, the chapter will examine philosophical perspectives on risk, trust, and social media technologies, to offer a better overview of the environment in which families develop their practices around social media technologies.

The chapter will finish with an overview of the themes emerging from the literature, and the lens which they build to better understand the data collected for this project.

### **1. Families and the role of ICTs in shaping family practices**

This literature review begins with an examination of pertinent theories relating to what constitutes "family", what role family has in an individual's development, and what the pertinent studies around ICTs and family life are there. The first sub-section looks at family practices, the second - parenting styles with respect to social media, and the third - at children's usage of social media.

#### **1.1 Sociological perspectives on family and parenting**

The notion of "family" is central to Western society (United Nations, 1989). It is a "private" space, separate from the demands of public life; one that is not to be infringed upon unless in the most extreme of circumstances; one that opposes the notion of "individuality" (Ribbens McCarthy, 2008.) At the same time, "having a family" is considered to be a crucial part of adult development in general, and specifically for women (Lawler, 2008; Ribbens McCarthy, 2008.) Any challenge to the family institution - for example, the moves to redefine the legal definition of marriage - is perceived as a threat (Carr et al., 2006). "Family" is also acknowledged as field of risk production. "Family" is where an individuals' wellbeing can be threatened because of economic or emotional

dependence (Crenshaw, 2006); it is also a space that is difficult to intervene in (HMIC, 2015a, 2015b).

The individualisation thesis as applied to the family is one that Carole Smart describes as one of the more “pessimistic” ones (Smart, 2007), both in terms of romantic love, but also family life. As analysed in “Personal Life”, the individualisation of families theory has two main components: the decline of traditional social relationships, and the institutional binding of individuals that pulls them away from their families (Smart, 2007). While the formulation raises questions as to what “traditional social relationships” refers to, the individualization thesis does offer a helpful point of departure in understanding risk production and the challenges families might face on a day-to-day basis. This is important because of how the approaches to risk management in the family home have been translated to policy. It’s also an important perspective because the data will disprove the individualisation thesis.

“Family” is also a field of discourse, in which notions of class are being played out through the different choices parents make about their children’s upbringing (Ribbens McCarthy, 1994). Harman and Cappellini, for example, in their study of middle-class mothers’ discourses around the contents of their children’s lunch boxes, discovered the ways in which certain notions about what it means to be a “good mother” are played out - notions which were rooted in ideas about “poverty” and the characteristics of working class people, and how it is necessary to set oneself apart from them (Harman and Cappellini, 2015). Similarly, Ribbens demonstrated in her study of mothers and their children that notions of good parenting among middle-class mothers in Britain originate, at least in part, in notions about social class and performance (Ribbens McCarthy, 1994).

It is necessary to bear those ideas about family and parenting in mind when examining the online world, and the studies investigating digital parenting. However, it is also worth asking whether narratives on technology are consistent in generations across social class, or if they vary per the family environment. For this reason, the “family practices” framework is crucial.

Though David Morgan popularised the “family practices” framework, he is not the first person to have coined the term, and it has been used to one degree or another to describe certain transactions that occur in family relationships over time (Morgan, 1996). While some of the ideas developed in “Rethinking Family Practices” have been explored through the lenses of “family life”, “emotional labour” or “displaying families”, they lacked acknowledgement of the fluidity of

personal relationships – the ways in which connections between individuals are often subject to change, an understanding of day-to-day living (Morgan, 2011, Bauman 2012). Similarly, Carol Smart expresses the need for family sociology to move away from the static idea of family as a fixed subject (Smart, 2007).

The particular terminology of “family practices” has been subject to critique – questions have been raised whether ‘practices’ is not too ambiguous a term, and ‘family’ - too specific. Morgan describes family practices as having “a taken-for-granted quality” (Morgan, 2011) but disagrees with Cheal’s idea that they consist of “all the ordinary, everyday actions that people do insofar as they are intended to have some effect on another family member” (Cheal, 2002:2, cited in Morgan, 2011:9). Morgan argues that there are three key aspects of the family practices approach: “fluidity of boundaries”, a combination of relationships “both multiple and multiplex”, and “the continued presence of uncertainty, risk and unpredictability” (2011:52). In other words, not only is risk a factor in family practices, it is central to their development.

To summarise this section, the literature surrounding family and family practices is intertwined with discourses around risk, personal identity, and child welfare. Family practices are a complex background against which issues of risk and trust in social media technologies play out, as the next sections will show. It is important to note these perspectives, too, because the next section – focusing on digital parenting styles – will reflect some of these themes.

## **1.2 Digital parenting styles**

This section will examine literature surrounding digital parenting styles and how they are connected to discourses of risk and trust are played out in the family. For the most part, academic literature is focused on families where children are old enough to have an input in the family practices around social media technologies (Valcke et al., 2010a). However, since 2015, more there has been more attention on the social media practices of families with babies and toddlers, and the ways in which young parents are shaping the relationship of their children with social media (Webb, 2013; Tait, 2015; Brockes, 2019).

Aunola and colleagues identify four different approaches to digital parenting: laissez-faire, permissive, authoritative, authoritarian (Aunola et al. 2000, cited in Valcke et al., 2010). Each style has its own varying levels of demand towards the children and involvement in the children’s online lives. This view is confirmed by Valcke and colleagues who, upon repeating that research in the

Flemish context, found that there is a fifth mode of digital parenting: within it, parents set and enforce clear rules for their children's online usage, but make sure that the children feel comfortable seeking guidance (Valcke et al., 2010a). This last mode of digital parenting was also the one displayed the most by the families interviewed for this project.

However, despite the lack of diverging digital parenting styles observed in this thesis, it is worth examining the main components of those styles because they relate to the findings and the factors identified in this study as influencing the family practices. Valcke and colleagues confirmed the findings of Aunola and colleagues from 2000 that Internet access is limited in immigrant households (Valcke et al., 2010a). They also confirmed that levels of education have an effect on the levels of warmth (Valcke et al, 2010) (how parents create a safe environment for their children to ask questions and guidance regarding the Internet; which has also been observed in the dataset.) Personal feelings and inclination towards technology might account for different parenting styles, class factors like education levels and immigration status also have had a role to play in the way these families approached social media. The most common modes of digital parenting were permissive or authoritative (Aunola et al, 2000; Valcke et al, 2010). What this means is that for most of the families studied, digital practices involved some measure of freedom or control, rather than going to either extreme.

The extent to which the studies cited thus far are representative of families outside of the Flemish context is uncertain. Online monitoring software, which allows parents to track their children's Internet usage, has existed as early as 1994, indicating that there is a market from people who adopt more control-based modes of digital parenting. An article by PC Mag from November 2018 has listed the top ten best current software available to parents, with a price range from £14.99 to £89.99 (Rubenking, 2018). A research article by Wang and colleagues notes high rates of parental monitoring of their teenagers' Internet usage as far as 14 years ago (Wang, Bianchi and Raley, 2005). A decade later, danah boyd<sup>1</sup> found that children's usage of the Internet varied depending on the socio-economic status of their family, in that children with more access had very different experiences of social media than children with less access (boyd, 2014). She also

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<sup>1</sup> danah boyd – a researcher of online communities who has made the choice to legally change her name to not include capitalisations. Because this is the author's expressed desire, references to their work in this thesis will also not include capitalisations. Source: <http://www.danah.org/name.html>

speculated that the rise of Internet usage among teenagers might have some connection to the limitation for other, non-online forms of socialisation (boyd, 2014).

Outside of academic publications, the role of parents in managing their children's relationships with social media has become the subject of debate. Cases such as the suicide of Molly Russell (Crawford, 2019), who took her own life in 2017, have highlighted the limits of what parents can do to control their children's usage of social media. Despite the enquiry revealing multiple factors, the reporting focused on the fact that the girl had been viewing content online that encouraged self-harm; for this reason, Molly's father went on record to say that "Instagram helped kill (his) daughter" (Crawford, 2019). The case has led to the UK government taking a hard stance against social media companies that do not monitor or moderate distressing content (Adams, 2019; Hern, 2019). Meanwhile, organisations like the NSPCC have campaigned for both better family practices (Share Aware, NSPCC, 2015) and for more regulation of social media companies (Wild West Web, NSPCC, 2018). Such responses to tragedy put the blame on the technology for introducing risk but tend to overlook any other factors that might have played a part. This is a fallacy that the thesis will try to steer away from.

At this point in the literature review, several themes have emerged regarding digital parenting and their role in family practices. The first is the importance of the family environment in general, the levels of control that parents impose on their children's online lives. The second is the popularity of "trust but verify" approach to risk, as seen by the types of parenting software available on the market. The third is the limitations of what parents can do when trying to go against the ways in which social media companies filter and promote certain kinds of content to their children. However, there is another strand of literature that is pertinent: one which looks at social media technologies and the choices made by the parents of children too young to understand what social media is, and what its implications are.

The literature on digital parenting and children can be separated into two categories – infant consumption of social media content, and non-consensual sharing of information and pictures of very young children on social media platforms.

Nansen (2015) classifies infant social media consumption into three categories, all facilitated through what they call "a network of ambient devices, user-friendly interfaces, proxy users, and software sorting", the purpose of which is to make social media as invisible as possible

(Nansen, 2015). Burroughs (2017) writes about YouTube algorithms replacing parents as being the main curators for the content which young children are consuming or viewing. What this strand of literature focuses on is how mobile applications are taking centre stage in the digital parenting of very young children (Burroughs, 2017) and how the algorithms in these applications are vulnerable to exploitation (Bridle, 2017). It was found a decade ago that usage of social media devices (iPads, phones with touchscreen) was on the rise among children under 3 years of age, through what researchers called “the pass-back effect” (Chiong & Shuler, 2010:3). This effect is indicative of a certain style of laissez-faire digital parenting that is now cautioned against (Burroughs, 2017). However, consumption of social media is systemically facilitated, which has a bearing on both the findings and the general understanding of digital parenting.

In contrast, non-consensual sharing of images of children on social media is tied up with parenting, and the literature on the topic focuses on issues of privacy and individual agency. For example, newspaper articles caution parents not to make YouTube celebrities of their children (Tait, 2015) or even share pictures of those children on social media at all (Webb, 2013). Writers like Williams (2019) have focused on the ways in which social media algorithms may infringe on people’s privacy even if they are not on social media – a phenomenon referred to as “shadow Facebook account” (Williams, 2019). The unifying theme of these articles is that children too young to understand what social media is, and what the consequences of social media are, should not be put into the spotlight (Webb, 2013; Tait, 2015; Williams, 2019).

Parents who engage in social media for the sake of their very young children, as discussed by Webb (2013) and Tait (2015), are the most obvious example of adults introducing online risks into children’s lives. However, the same logic can be applied to other family members and family friends. Parallels can be drawn between a parent’s social media account and the family album, as the early years of a child’s life are often considered precious (Webb, 2013). However, one notable difference is that a family album is created and intended for a specific, curated audience – an audience that has to be present in the home in order to view the pictures. There are precious few ways in which a person can control who sees what online, and once a piece of content is uploaded, it is difficult to remove (Ronson, 2015).

What this overview of digital parenting literature has shown is that there is a spectrum of family practices. These practices tend to be determined by the ages of the children, what parents

do on social media, and how content creation and sharing might be incentivised by the company itself. Education levels, family income, levels of control and warmth were also found to be important factors of family practices around social media. The question then becomes what these digital parenting practices are about. The next section will examine the literature surrounding children's usage of social media technologies.

### **1.3 Online risks to children**

Regardless of parenting styles, there is a sense of a moral panic (Clapton, Cree and Smith, 2013) surrounding the online practices of children (boyd, 2014). Companies like Google have implemented initiatives like "Be Internet Legends" (Lewin, 2018) while charities like the Cybersmile Foundation (2010) and the NSPCC (1984) have been campaigning for a safer Internet for children for the better part of the last decade. The two main strands of literature surrounding children's usage of social media concern online grooming and cyberbullying.

Children and adolescents are considered to be the group at most risk of online grooming (Whittle et al., 2013b). Online grooming and online sexual solicitation are seen as serious challenges by the police, but have proven to be difficult to investigate and prosecute (HMIC, 2015b). Academic literature has focused on the mechanisms by which grooming occurs and the known risks to children (Whittle et al., 2013a, 2013b; Williams, Elliott and Beech, 2013), and based on this research, it would appear that raising resilience is important. As such, online safety campaigns, such as the NSPCC's Share Aware, focus on increasing family resilience as the first line of defence against stranger danger (NSPCC, 2015). However, according to danah boyd's research, there is not much evidence that children encounter paedophiles online as frequently as it is assumed (boyd, 2014).

As for cyberbullying, there is no set definition of the term (Bonanno and Hymel, 2013). Most often, it is referred to as bullying through electronic means. Traditional bullying is defined as "intentioned and repeated aggression that involves disparity between victim and perpetrator" (Olweus, 1993, cited in Lituiller and Brausch, 2013:675), but academic studies on cyberbullying describe it as more insidious and problematic, as the nature of social media allows the attacker to remain anonymous, and the victim to experience the repercussions of an attack for years after the original incident occurred (Mishna, Saini and Solomon, 2009; Law et al., 2012; Bonanno and Hymel, 2013).

Much of the existing research on cyberbullying has been carried out on children in primary and secondary schools, and thus the subject has been explored at length, to the point where it is called “old wine in new bottle” (Li, 2007). Many studies point out the role of culture in preventing and managing the fallout of cyberbullying incidents, because of the power bystanders have on impacting upon the outcome (Lodge and Frydenberg, 2005; Holfeld, 2014). Nonetheless, cyberbullying remains one of the biggest concerns and threats to the wellbeing of children, as exemplified by the most recent guidelines released by the UK government (Morgan and Department for Education, 2015).

While online grooming and cyberbullying are the more common concerns related to children’s social media usage, a third category of risk has gained public interest in the time of this writing. Cases such as the death of Molly Russell – who viewed images promoting self-harm and suicide on Instagram before committing suicide (Griffiths, 2019) – have drawn attention to the impact of certain kinds of content on social media users. The difference between cyberbullying and content-based victimisation is that the latter is algorithm-driven (Dodd, 2018) and thus liable to exploitation (Adams, 2019). In the aftermath, efforts have been made to change the culture of providers, and making them more accountable (Hern, 2019). However, at the time of this writing, it is not yet clear which proposals will be enshrined into English Law.

Because of this perseverance of information on the Internet, every interaction has a timeless quality to it, making it very difficult for actors to divorce their online character from an incident, even years after it took place. In cyber-bullying literature (Mishna and colleagues, 2012; Law and colleagues, 2012) this recurrence means that victims can relive the bullying, which can have lasting impact on their lives. For children of parents who are involved in social media, this could lead to immediate and delayed issues, including bullying of school and issues with self-image (Tait, 2015). For children whose victimisation comes from the content introduced to them (Griffiths, 2019) the purging of their “virtual space” is made more difficult by the way algorithms that are put in place by the social media platform. This shows social media risks as not only being situational, but long-term as well.

#### **1.4 Section Summary**

What this section has shown is that, while there are many aspects of digital parenting and the risks to children, there are a few overarching themes that are relevant to this thesis. The first

theme is that of the family as an intersecting space for individual development and also as a field upon which ideas of class and risk are played out. The second is the role of levels of warmth and trust in determining family social media practices. The third is that social media presents a great many risks to children, particularly risk of online grooming, risk of cyberbullying, and risk from unwanted or inappropriate content. With that in mind, the next section of this literature review will look at the drivers of social media usage for both parents and children.

## **2. Living in a connected society**

The first part of this literature review focused on family literature, parenting practices, and the risks to children online. Given the gravity of the risks outlined, and the levels of difficulty in mitigating them, the question of what drives social media usage is raised. This section will look at several factors that might explain social media's popularity: the culture of connectivity, the ways in which access to social media serves as a social marker, the role of trust, and the role of online communities in people's social development.

### **2.1 The culture of connectivity**

Jose Van Dijck (2013) describes the culture of connectivity as one where sharing is of utmost importance - indeed, to not share, to maintain one's privacy (on- and off-line) is seen as going against the principles of individuality, connectivity and transparency. This attitude has been encouraged and reinforced by various social media platforms (van Dijck, 2013) but also by individuals themselves (Kale, 2019). In traditional media, children (referred to as "millennials") are often stereotyped as too-sensitive, vain, and more interested in the image they present online than in anything of substance ; in the same breath, those of them who choose to be "logged off" are treated as interesting curios (Kale, 2019). Often, anti-social media articles end with an adage about how even staying off-line is not an option anymore, as we cannot stop people from writing about us and creating a "shadow social media page" (Williams, 2019).

The culture of connectivity does not just impact upon children. Older generations are affected in terms of how they negotiate the interpersonal boundaries between their work and their home lives, how they define productivity (Wajcman, 2015), how they build social capital in a changing world (Sheller and Urry, 2006), how they use ICTs as a tool to build businesses and share information (Lanier, 2013) and how they use social media to amplify their voices and speak up

about issues of global social justice (Morozov, 2018). Risks to children online, such as cyberbullying and grooming, can also impact adults (Ronson, 2013). For some adults more than others, the stakes are higher - as shown by Ronson (2013) reputational loss of an adult (or “public shaming”) can lead to the person turning into a social outcast.

However, the culture of connectivity is shown to impact upon different people in different ways (boyd, 2014). Indeed, Baym (2013) has shown that, rather than making the world more equal, social media replicates structures of oppression and privilege in virtual space. One of the ways in which such structures of oppression are replicated is through access and gatekeeping.

The question of access is one that plays out in different ways in the literature. While social forces create the expectation for people to become more and more mobile (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2012) they do not all have the same devices or frequent the same websites, nor do they all have the same perceptions of risky behaviour. There is also lack of a consensus on what circumstances create trust in another person or website. Interventions and education created with the purpose of making the online world safer for children are shown to have inconclusive outcomes (Mishna and colleagues, 2010; Valke and colleagues, 2007). Research results point to the home as the place where interventions are most likely to be successful. This is not only because many young online aggressors tend to come from troubled family backgrounds (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004) but also because parental control is shown to be the one that has a significant effect on reducing risk-taking behaviour on the part of the children (Mishna and colleagues, 2010).

While research shows that various social media platforms are popular among young adults, and integral to their social lives (boyd, 2014; Duggan, 2015) usage among adults over 50 years of age is far less common (Duggan, 2015). The variety of social media channels and the devices they are being accessed on is very different among generations - as Duggan finds, most adults over 50 who engage with social media platforms do so through Facebook, without finding it necessary to take part of other websites like Pinterest (2010), Instagram (2010) and Tumblr (2007). The latter two platforms, on the other hand, are very popular among teenagers and young adults (Duggan, 2015). That is not to say that adults do not use the Internet for reasons other than improving their social lives - indeed, John Horrigan (2016) finds it to be an important tool for lifelong learners.

As regard to families, Eynon and Helsper (2015) conducted a survey-based study of 2075 respondents in the UK, which examined the effect of children to their parents’ Internet usage. The

study had a response rate of 51%; 1498 respondents were Internet users, making it one of the bigger surveys available. The presence of young children in the household (under 10 years of age) correlated positively with high usage of social media, communicating through blogs and seeking information. The presence of teenagers and older children was shown to limit personal communication online - presumably because adults have to compete with their teenagers over the usage of available devices in the household - but not any of the other activities. By far, the authors found that access to the Internet and the usage of social media technologies was very gendered, with women expressing less confidence in using them than men (Eynon and Helsper, 2015).

However, those results are relevant for families in certain socio-economic classes. Adults from poorer backgrounds, adults with lower education levels, and adults without access to the necessary technological devices are less likely to know about, and engage with, the technologies that might improve their lives and further their knowledge (Horrigan, 2016). Helsper (2010) also found differences in the ways in which adults used the Internet, along the lines of age, gender, and life stage. She further articulated her findings in her Corresponding Fields Model for the Links Between Social and Digital Exclusion (Helsper, 2012). Digital exclusion is shown to have powerful consequences and has led to the further victimisation of vulnerable children and adults, as seen in the United Nation's Commissioner report on inequality in the United Kingdom (OHCHR, 2018).

What this section has shown is that while there is a lot of awareness about the risk children face on social media, there runs a parallel cultural driver which makes it more difficult for people to be "off-line". However, those pressures are very different depending on the age of the person, their access to technology, and how well they understand the implications of what they are doing. The next section will examine the practical implications of social media in more detail.

## **2.2 Practical impact of increased usage of social media technologies by families**

Some of the literature on social media technologies and the family focuses on the technology as a disruptive element, a matter of contention between the different generations; and indeed, there are very different concerns that people have over what is used, how long is it used for, and for what purposes. However, as Helsper (2010) observes, the factors that influence these disparities are more often associated with general life factors, gender, and class. While it is customary to think of social media sites as being used by children for recreation, the reality is far

more diverse (boyd, 2014). Many children, and even some families, have taken the opportunities presented by online advertising to make a living from their social media accounts (Carr, 2015; Chapman, 2016).

On a more day-to-day level, families take advantage of social media to stay in touch with their extended social circles and families. Moreover, in some cases technology has had to fill a gap that change has enforced - to take an example from boyd (2014), when examining the physical mobility of teenagers in the United States of America, she noted that their ability to move freely in public spaces has decreased in past decades. Though she acknowledges the need for more research in this particular area, she posits that a combination of public fear about street safety and driving teenagers away from public spaces has resulted in children seeking new places to take part in public life - and so they turned to the virtual world (boyd, 2014).

In terms of exhibited behaviour, Metzger and colleagues (2015) found that there are high levels of comparative optimism among both parents and children about the children's ability to evaluate the information available online (to determine whether something is safe or not). However, as that same paper goes on to state, the analysis failed to differentiate between types of usage and the kinds of information evaluation strategies were being employed by children to determine credibility (Metzger, Flanagin and Nekmat, 2015). What this might mean in practical terms is that children may be better placed to discern risky behaviours in some settings rather than others, or that they employ a limited kind of strategies (Metzger, Flanagin and Nekmat, 2015).

Like adults, children use the Internet for a variety of reasons: to connect with their friends, to explore interests, to get information and help for school projects, as seen in boyd's "It's Complicated: The social lives of networked teens" (boyd, 2014). boyd's work is pertinent to this thesis, as she links children's increased usage of the Internet to the decreased access children have both to public spaces and to private alone time. These changes in the way that children's time is managed, boyd argues, have contributed to the usage of social media and the rise of online communities (boyd, 2014).

Online communities offer an opportunity to explore aspects of oneself that one might not feel comfortable exploring in their day-to-day life. For example, LGBTQUIA+ communities, or sexual health advice columns like "Scarleteen" (1998) are created to provide safe, non-judgemental relationship support for children. Some of these communities can take up the form of

virtual support groups, like the ones described by Whitty and Joinson (2009); however, most of the time it is a forum where people connect over shared experiences (Drost and Schippers, 2015). However, the most important factor for such communities to work is trust.

Trust is vital in the formation and development of online communities (Whitty and Joinson, 2009). Trust is also one of the main characteristics of family units, and in “families of choice” (Weeks, 2005), as it allows individuals to be vulnerable to one another without fear. Trust – and, in more practical terms, the sharing of personal information and experiences – helps people build and maintain social bonds (Flashman and Gambetta, 2014).

Research has shown that a strong sense of one’s own identity brings about better confidence and resilience (Garmezy and Rutter, 1988; Konnikova, 2016; Martocci, 2015; Brown, 2015, 2017, 2018). But that sense cannot be defended forever - users cannot factor for the behaviour of their social network, (boyd, 2014; Webb, 2013), and the kind of information they share about them (Fowler, 2012). Not all information on the Internet is accurate or perpetuates desirable behaviour, and social media users often fall into the trap of seeking out information that reaffirms their pre-conceptions (Eysenbach et al, 2012) rather than challenge them. In terms of family life online, trust is vital – not just the trust parents have in their children’s abilities to cope (Valcke and colleagues, 2010), but also the trust children, the children’s network, and society at large, have with parents to make the most appropriate decision for their families (Tait, 2015).

What this section has shown is that there are many practical reasons why children might want to be on social media, despite the risks associated with it. There are also many social pressures that could influence the family’s decision on when to start using social media. Trust – or the condition for disclosure (Whitty and Joinson, 2008) is seen as a crucial factor in whether a person’s online experience would be a positive or negative one. This leads to the matter of what the conditions are for children to use social media which is taken up in the sub-section below. This, in turn, leads into a conversation about the philosophical perspectives on risk and trust, and how they might be interpreted in the context of this thesis. This conversation is developed in Section Three.

### **2.3 Conditions of social media usage**

Safe Internet practices for children in this thesis can be divided into two broad categories: technical and behavioural. Technical focuses on how social media accounts are set up, with either missing or erroneous information being given (boyd, 2014). Behavioural focuses on what people

do on their social media accounts. The latter is what this section will focus on the most, as it is the kind that is the most likely to be negotiated between parents and children before the start of social media usage (Department for Education, 2018; United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, 2019).

Conditions for the usage of social media are based on how parents think their children will respond to the three types of risk: content risks, contact risks, and commercial risks (De Moor et al 2008, cited in Valcke et al., 2011). This could include not viewing inappropriate content, not talking to strangers, and not responding to inappropriate advertising. Digital parenting, as seen from earlier in this chapter, is determined on the trust, levels of involvement, and levels of warmth (Valcke et al., 2010a). It is also determined by how an individual might go about curating their online persona.

Individuals tailor their social media profiles to the best of their ability, according to their perceived audience and the impressions they are trying to create (Lanier, 2011). As with face-to-face interactions, there is advice and informal guidelines about the kinds of impressions people are supposed to make on different sites (Wang, Bianchi and Raley, 2005; Department for Education, 2018; Williams, 2019). Sometimes those guidelines can be inferred from the platform's description - LinkedIn, for example, is a networking website for professionals. Users refer to their contextual cues in order to understand how to interact with one another, and what is and is not appropriate to say or do on any given platform (boyd and Elinson, 2007; boyd, 2014).

The distinction between websites, and thus aspects of one's personality, is quite fluid online – due to the lack of physical settings, and people whose context cues might be beneficial (Tavani, 2007). There are no set norms that determine what kind of behaviour one would expect to encounter in a certain context - for example, an individual's workplace (Goffman, 1959). The latter is of particular importance, not only because it links back to the idea of reflexivity and individualisation within the society, but also because trust within one's ability to cope is a skill that depends on one's immediate community. Trust also determines how one interacts with members of one's community (Braddock and Morrison, 2018) to whatever end that may bring.

## **2.4 Section Summary**

The main themes arising from this section have been around the culture of connectivity, the impact of mobility, both physical and virtual, on everyday life, and the role of rules around social media usage. The literature discussed has highlighted some of the drivers for social media

usage, both for children and parents, and has added some dimension to the argument that the online world holds nothing but risk for those who participate in social media. The next section will look at some philosophical perspectives on risk and trust in order to find a framework that helps explain what has been observed in literature so far.

### **3. Perspectives on risk, trust, and social media technologies**

This section will examine the risk society perspective, as written by Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1991) and explain in what ways it relates to the research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis, and why that view is more suitable than other existing perspectives on risk. It will also examine perspectives on trust, including the intersection of ‘trust’ as a security term online, ‘trust’ as a risk factor, and ‘trust’ as a condition that enables vulnerability, self-disclosure, and strong informal connections between individuals. The argument will be made that security and trust are two self-reinforcing conditions: as trust enables people to build strong connections, and strong connections reinforce both trust and security. However, due to the dual nature of ‘trust’ online as both a risk and a security factor, its relationship with the family is made more. This will set the stage for the final part of this section, which looks at philosophical perspectives on technology and how they relate to theories of risk and trust.

#### **3.1 The risk society perspective**

One of the more well-known perspectives on risk is risk society, as articulated by Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1991). The risk society perspective posits that the production of risk is a by-product of the production of wealth, and that in the post-industrial society, the production of risks has overshadowed the production of wealth. In Beck’s writings, risk avoidance – which he describes in the context of environmental crises - is the main aim of society today; and while some risks are distributed unevenly along lines of class, eventually they become so great they impact everyone, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, gender, or creed (Beck, 1992). Similarly, Giddens (1991) draws connections between the personal and the global, to the ways individual behaviours reflect world trends and happenings.

Where Beck’s “Risk Society” (Beck, 1992) takes a long-term view in terms of threats to the environment, “Modernity and Self-Identity” focuses more on the self and the fragmentation of experience (Giddens, 1991.). Fragmentation is also a big aspect of globalization and the demand

for a more mobile workforce (Sheller and Urry, 2006). Such displacement of families often necessitates the usage of new technologies to facilitate movement (Wajcman, 2015.).

That leads to the final aspect of the risk society perspective, which is technological determinism, or the increased usage of new technologies to maximise the production of wealth - even at the cost of community wellbeing. One example might be the research that Judy Wajcman presents in “Pressed for Time” (2015). While not all people use new technologies in the same way, the pressure to remain mobile and accessible leads to work intruding into the private lives of families, which has corresponding effects on the overall wellbeing of all members (Wajcman, 2015). While it is the production of risk that is central to the risk society theoretical framework, the advancement of technology has a huge part to play in making risk production exceed the production of wealth (Beck, 1992).

It is noteworthy that the concept of risk is not interchangeable with the concept of harm, nor is risk necessarily the precursor to an undesirable, preventable event (Kemshall, 2017). Indeed, the word “risk” can have many meanings, depending on the context in which it is used, and the discipline that employs it, as discussed by Lupton (1999). In some cases, “risk” can mean “the likelihood of harm”. In others, it can also mean “the likelihood of success.” As argued by Anke Gorrzig in Livingstone and colleagues (2012) both meanings are possible when looking at people’s online lives, and the online lives of families. The public discourses on online risk tend to focus on the “consequences of unsafe Internet behaviour” to children (Valcke and colleagues, 2011:1295) - cyber-bullying, exposure to inappropriate content, sexual solicitation and exploitation, and sexual grooming (Livingstone and colleagues, 2012). However, there are aspects of online risk that impact adults as well as children.

While there are many philosophical perspectives on risk (Lupton, 1999), risk society is the one that incorporates the role of technology and individual experience (Land, 2016) in producing risk. The next section, which focuses on trust, will reflect Beck’s risk society further (Beck, 1992) by emphasising the role of trust in building successful relationships.

### **3.2 Perspectives on trust**

Trust is a concept with multiple meanings when applied to social media, as pointed out by Whitty and Joinson (2009). Trust is one of the main factors in the forming of strong relationships between friends and family (Sullivan, 1998; Weeks, 2005), and in promoting personal wellbeing

(Brown, 2015). In broad terms, trust is a condition that facilitates self-disclosure and interpersonal connections and enables an individual to feel safe in the presence of other; it is “a sense of confidence (Zutrauen) in one’s expectations” (Luhmann, 1981, cited from Kindle edition). Like risk (Kemshall 2017), trust is necessary for the function of everyday life (Luhmann, 1981).

That is not to say that trust is monolithic or easily distinguishable. Indeed, Braddock and Morrison catalogue five kinds of trust from the abstract to the personal (Seligman, 1999 and Rathbun, 2009 cited in Braddock and Morrison, 2018). This thesis focuses on Luhmann’s conceptualisations of trust because it is the broadest, but also references Seligman (1999) and Rathbun (2009) in the chapter on insider threats, as both generalized trust and mistrust in principle have a role to play.

While there are no direct connections drawn at present between the risk society perspective and research on trust and vulnerability, individualisation and isolation are themes that these academic streams have in common. Brown (2015) links individual isolation, perfectionism and breakdown of communication to increased stress and dissatisfaction with life. In “Rising Strong”, as well as in her other works, she uses the term “vulnerability” to describe the state which people must enter in order to better connect with others: to make oneself vulnerable is to be present during interaction, to share one’s thoughts and feelings, even at the risk of being misunderstood, ignored, or ridiculed (Brown, 2015). Brown’s description of modern-day interpersonal isolation echoes Beck’s risk society in that individualisation takes precedence over community, people grow distant from each other, and live in fear of harm (be it physical or psychological.) (Beck and Ritter, 1992). Brown’s proposed solution– to make oneself vulnerable– is conditional on having trust in others (Brown, 2017).

It is important to state that trust is not a fixed concept, however. Some of that has been seen so far in the thesis, but it will be explored in more detail in this chapter. More specifically, trust as described by the participants will be revealed as: (1) fluid, (2) context-dependent (Morgner, 2018), and (3) shaped by relationships (Flashman and Gambetta, 2014). When discussing trust, both Brené Brown (2015) and Laura Martocci (2015) examine the personal, the intimate, the individual’s own perception of their worth when compared to others. Martocci identifies shame as the major risk factor that people are most likely to be afraid of, and aim to avoid; which is why bullying, an act of interpersonal violence aiming to make an individual ashamed, is seen as a

“destruction of self” (Martocci, 2015). Though shame is seen as a very personal risk, Martocci looks at it as a community problem, linking the breakdown of communities to the decrease of individual access to support, which in turn leads to the perpetuation of shame and interpersonal violence. In other words, isolation and mistrust of others creates risks for the individual (Brown, 2015, 2017).

On a similar note, Olivia Laing’ examines isolation in modern cities through the lens of art history and loneliness (Laing, 2016) – she looks at the ways in which loneliness was both an individual and a social ill, born out of fear (or the risk of harm). In Laing’s writing, loneliness is both a reaction to what individuals and groups perceive as a risk, and a consequence of how society treats those that are perceived as different, deviant, or bad (Laing, 2016). However, far from keeping people from harm, loneliness increases risk-seeking behaviours and creates more adverse health conditions, both directly and indirectly. Laing uses the particular example of the AIDS crisis in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, and how it was exacerbated by society’s response to the ill (Laing, 2016). Within the writings of Laing (2016), Brown (2015, 2017), and Martocci (2015), the themes of social capital and community emerge as crucial in the discourses on trust. As seen from those writings, it would seem that the more a person suffers from a lack of community and social capital, the more likely they are to engage in risky behaviours; however, trust is essential for the formation of those communities.

While the concepts of trust and risk are sometimes contrasted against each other in academic writing (Mythen, 2014), what this section has demonstrated is that they have mixed connotations. The post-industrial society does produce a lot of risks (Beck and Ritter, 1992). There is a tendency when it comes to online interactions, for people to take responsibility for their actions, suffering both benefit and punishment, without being able to ask for help (Laing, 2016; Brown, 2017).

At the same time, trust is not an antithesis to risk. Rather, it is a condition for participating in networks, on- and off-line, (Whitty and Joinson, 2008; Brown, 2017). Trust is bestowed, but it can also be taken away. As earlier sections of this literature review have shown, trust is a vital component of family practices online (Valcke et al., 2010a) and a crucial aspect of evaluating and managing risk. The next section will look at literature on attitudes to social media technologies and how risk and trust play out in the online context.

### 3.3 Social media technologies

While social media used to be considered the interest of children (Patel, 2011), current research that is being published and presented focuses on the various uses members of older generations find in social media technologies – for leisure as well as for functionality (Ivan and Hebblethwaite, 2016; Lifshitz et al., 2016; Barbosa Neves et al, 2016; Stephen Katz, 2016). Some differences in social media adoption might be observed among members of different generations, but not sufficiently (Helsper and Eynon, 2010) and there are many factors that have been shown to influence usage – such as exposure to the technology, social environment, and family attitudes (boyd, 2014). In that context, it is relevant to look at alternative models that explain the usage of social media technologies – ones that do not use age or generationalism as their theoretical bases.

The Technology Adoption Lifetime Cycle (Moore, 1991) could help explain some of the findings of the thesis. It contextualises social media adoption in terms of innovation and early adoption rather than age, and helps explain some of the trends that are being predicted with regards to smartphone usage of over 65's (Deloitte, 2017). The wider applications of social media have led to wide-spread adoption, to the point where popular media outlets now proclaim that “Facebook is for old people now” (Mark Sewney, 2018).

The features of social media platforms - their interactivity, the ease at which they make people accessible to one another, the way they allow them to share various private information - invoke both fear and optimism. “Technophobic” writings acknowledge the benefits ICTs have had (Tchudi, 2000; Ledrer, 2010). On a similar note, people who appreciate technology and what it does have also written with scepticism, warning about the limitations of technology to change the world (Lanier, 2011; Morozov, 2011) and reminding users that it is up to them to make the most of the opportunities the Internet presents. However, despite the apparent divide in opinions, it appears as though most people's attitudes towards technology is best described as techno-neutralism, or even techno-ambivalence (Lanier, 2011; Morozov, 2011).

Both Lanier and Morozov advocate for what Baym calls a techno-realistic approach (2010). Neither pessimistic nor optimistic, techno-realism includes the strengths and weaknesses of ICT and considers the users and what they do online, and why. It is an approach that moves the conversation away from discussing whether technology itself is a tool of good or evil, and towards viewing it as a tool, one that has a certain cost: that of privacy and personal data. The critical

discourse around the ways in which social media platforms use data and infringe on people's privacy has been the subject of numerous debates (Lyons, 2019; Siddique, 2019) and has been one of the drivers for the adoption of GDPR by the European Union (May 2018). This is the environment in which most families with children have their conversations around the adoption of social media technologies.

### **3.4 Section summary**

This section has examined philosophical perspectives on risk, trust, and social media technologies. Risk society offers a lens through which to view the interactions between family, technology, and risk production (Giddens, no date; Beck and Ritter, 1992) while literature on trust offers a perspective through which to explain the continued engagement of family members with social media technologies despite the risks involved (Whitty and Joinson, 2008; Brown, 2015). Philosophical perspectives on social media technologies suggest that most people are ambivalent (Lanier, 2013) or techno-realistic (Baym, 2010) which suggests most families engaged with social media do so because of their own practical motives. While the stereotype is that children use social media because it is a generational staple (Patel, 2011) more recent research seems to indicate that social media users are becoming more diverse, and use social media platforms for a variety of purposes functionality (Ivan and Hebblethwaite, 2016; Lifshitz et al., 2016; Barbosa Neves et al, 2016; Stephen Katz, 2016). Alongside the rest of this literature review, this offers an interesting lens through which to examine the data collected as part of this project.

### **Chapter overview and key gaps in theory**

This chapter has looked at three main groups of literature – families and the role of ICTs in shaping family practices, the culture of mobility and connectivity, and philosophical perspectives on risk, trust, and social media technologies. It has isolated specific themes within the literature to better examine the data with, and has focused on the risk society perspective (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) to provide the main frame around which the findings can be built. This chapter has also touched on some of the gaps in the literature – gaps which will be explored in the empirical chapters, and gaps which this thesis will attempt to fill.

Risk society's main tenets – that risk production has exceeded wealth production, that the risk production is exacerbated by technological determinism, and that it drives individualisation

(Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck, 1992) – reflect many themes found in literature around family (Smart, 2007; Morgan, 2011), risks to children on social media (Eynon and Helsper, 2015; Siddique, 2019), and the culture of connectivity (van Dijck, 2013). While risk to children is the main focus of policy and reform in the UK (Morgan and Department for Education, 2015; NSPCC, 2015; United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, 2019) adults face similar challenges, and produce risk as much as children. The persistence of the idea that children are more technologically adept than their parents (but also at more risk) is the first place where theory galls short. Going beyond the idea of intergenerational perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies is the first gap that the thesis will attempt to fill.

The key themes that have emerged from the first section have been that of the family as both a protected space (Morgan, 1996; Smart, 2007) and an arena upon which parents' choices are being held up for scrutiny (Harman and Cappellini, 2015); trust, warmth and involvement as key factors in determining digital parenting styles (Valcke et al., 2010a); and children at risk of bullying (Mishna, Saini and Solomon, 2009), grooming (Whittle et al., 2013b), and inappropriate content online (Drost and Schippers, 2015; Hern, 2019). These themes will reappear in the data, as they are integral to the ways in which families conceptualised their online practices. However, they are not the only ones – expanding on the risks families encounter is another one of the gaps that this thesis will address.

Despite the risks of cyberbullying and grooming, both children and adults are engaged in social media, if not enthusiastically, then at least judiciously (Baym, 2010). This is not because one group of people is more gullible than the other, but because of environmental and social pressures (boyd, 2014; van Djick, 2013). The increased demands of mobility on a society (Sheller and Urry, 2006) and fragmentation of communities experiences (Laing, 2016) leads to a reliance on online communities and virtual presence (boyd, 2014; Morozov, 2013; Whitty & Joinson, 2008). Loneliness (Laing, 2016) and peer pressure (Catanzaro, 2011) are two of the main incentives in literature that drive social media usage, and will also be seen in the chapter on internal threats as they play a part in explaining why participants tolerated certain risks over others. Indeed, one of the bigger gaps identified in the literature is the role of trust in family practices, the mechanisms by which trust is built. By describing those mechanisms and demonstrating how those mechanisms can be exploited, this thesis will seek to fill that gap as well.

This brings the discussion to risk society and Beck and Giddens' ideas on how individualisation and technological determinism drive risk production (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991.) Examined separately, the social mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006) and the move towards more lonelier, individualised existence (Laing, 2016; Brown, 2017) appear as interesting aspects of modern living. However, examined in the family context (Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig, 2012) and in light of tragedies involving children and social media (Griffiths, 2019) they appear as crucial factors in the production of risk. The final gap in theory which this thesis will seek to fill out focuses on the application of a macro theory like risk society in a micro context. Specifically, it focuses what that application misses out, and how an individual-based approach might help address risk production in a different way. However, before laying out the findings, it is necessary to discuss the methodology used.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

Chapter One examined the literature surrounding family, technology, risk and trust, in order to better understand the current discussions being held around the topic of family practices around social media technologies. It has provided some of the main themes for this thesis, and the framework through which the data will be examined. This chapter will look at the methodology applied for both collecting the data and analysing it, before moving to the ethics and limitations of the chosen methods.

### **1. Ontology and epistemology**

To achieve its objectives, this project has adopted a social constructivist approach to the data (Bryman, 2012). It assumes that knowledge about risk and trust on social media is created through interactions with others. This is necessary as the focal points of this thesis are the family's co-constructed perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies, and the practical impact on their everyday usage.

Two strands of epistemological thought are relevant as regards social media technologies. The first is Baym's idea of technological realism/social shaping of technology (2010), because it includes both the limitations imposed on people by the technology, and the various boundary transgressions and reshaping that occur when people use that technology. It is a perspective that gives credit to people's individual agency while also acknowledging the limitations imposed on them by the format of the media.

The second strand that needs to be acknowledged is the one referred to by Braun and Clarke (2013) as "contextualism". This perspective requires not only data, but also the environment and society in which the data is produced. As already mentioned in the literature review, taking account of different personality presentations and being aware that differences might occur depending on the context or location is vital when doing social media research.

In previous literature, the topic of social media technologies, risk and trust has been explored from both a qualitative and a quantitative standpoint, with sample sizes ranging from

fewer than ten to five or six hundred participants (Livingstone & al., 2012; Hemphill & al., 2011; boyd, 2014). Because of the foci of this project, the format of the semi-structured family interview was deemed more useful, as it allowed the researcher to capture data while allowing the participants to shape the knowledge that was being created, and choose how to answer the questions (rather than leading their answers). Participant involvement was also solicited through the inclusion of an interactive game. The next section will go into more detail about how that method was chosen and what the timeline of the project looked like.

## 2. Research timeline

Although the research design consisted of family group interviews and an interactive game, this was not the original concept for the project. This section will lay out the timeline of the project, the different methodologies that were considered, and the lessons learned from the pilot projects that the researcher attempted.

The fieldwork was planned and developed over several phases. The timeline below details that development of the research methods from October 2015 to September 2017, when the research design was finalised and the fieldwork began. As the timeline shows, the researcher engaged with several methods before settling on the one used in this thesis:

<b>Phase One</b>	<b>Oct 15</b>	Beginning of research, literature review, and review of available research methods. Beginning of volunteering engagements.
	<b>Apr 16</b>	Methods Test 1: Focus group and diary study with university administrators.
	<b>Sep 16</b>	Methods Test 2: Focus group and diary study with university students.
	<b>Dec 16</b>	Methods Test 3: Interview and diary study.
<b>Phase Two</b>	<b>Feb 17</b>	First attempt at upgrade
	<b>Apr 17</b>	Final method decision: Family group interviews and games.
	<b>Jun 17</b>	Upgrade
	<b>Jul 17</b>	Gatekeeper interviews
	<b>Sep 17</b>	Pilot testing of the game
<b>Phase Three</b>	<b>Oct 17</b>	First family group interview
	<b>Jan 18</b>	Final family group interview
	<b>Apr 18</b>	End of transcribing and coding

Phase One of the fieldwork comprised the researcher's initial literature review and pilot testing between October 2015 and February 2017. It also involved the researcher's engagement with community centres and other groups of stakeholders that allowed valuable contacts to be developed. This was a crucial time for building relationships with the relevant gatekeepers (community centre managers, volunteer coordinators, school administrators) and potential participants. During Phase One, the researcher was involved as a volunteer at various organisations which gave her a chance to meet members of the community, identify potential participants, and build a contact list.

During Phase One, the researcher also conducted various pilot projects. As seen from the timeline, the research project was at first focused more on individual experiences rather than experiences of the family, which was not the best direction for the project. These pilots were planned but not carried out due to a lack of enrolment. After that time, the researcher changed her methodology to the family group interview and worked harder on communicating the benefits of taking part to participants.

Phase Two of the fieldwork occurred between February 2017 and October 2017. This was a time to fine-tune the question guide for the family group interviews (see Appendix 2 for full list of questions), as well as developing and testing the game design. The researcher used this time to interview some of the gatekeepers at community centres and schools, to identify aspects of the research that people had trouble with, as well as to single out research themes that may not have been apparent from the initial literature review. The game, for example, that families played was developed as a response to some of the gatekeepers' comments about trust online and the difficulty of conceptualising trust.

Phases Two and Three were also when the researcher started to gather and catalogue additional resources (government news bulletins, NGO-led cybersecurity news releases, cataloguing novels and non-fiction books aimed at children). This was done in order to provide a more rounded picture for some of the resources available to children and their parents as regard to learning about the online world. Some of those articles, books, and government bulletins were referred to in this thesis. Others served as the inspiration behind the scenarios played during the game and informed the researcher's approach to talking with some of the younger participants.

Phase Three consisted of the main interviews, transcription and data analysis. That phase started in October 2017 and continued until the write-up stage, in April 2018. During that time, the researcher contacted participants from Phase Two who had expressed an interest in the project, asking them if they still wanted to take part. The researcher also asked her wider contact network – developed throughout the previous two phases – to spread the word about the research, in the hopes of recruiting more participants. In the end, eleven families took part in the project – sixteen adults and twenty-two children, or thirty-eight people in total – as well as eight gatekeepers (Full List of the participant nicknames can be found in Appendix Five.).

The next section will examine in more detail the final methodology, why it was chosen, what its advantages and disadvantages are, and what the final interviews consisted of.

### **3 Research design**

As the timeline in the previous section shows, the researcher considered several different combinations of methods for this project. While they all had their respective strengths and weaknesses, the testing stages showed that they were not the best fit given this project's main foci. Because the project focused on intergenerational perceptions of risk and trust, the researcher chose family group interviews as her main methodology and created a game for the family to play in order to introduce an element of creativity into the interview. This was necessary to address concerns about social desirability and the problems with conceptualising trust that arose during the gatekeeper interviews.

The game had another purpose to it as well. As the researcher struggled with finding participants, she had very little time to establish rapport and trust with the families being interviewed. In most cases, the day of the interview was the only time the researcher interacted with the family face-to-face. As such, there was a need for an activity that would break the ice and build rapport– the game allowed that to happen, while also providing participants with multiple opportunities to discuss the topic without putting them on the spot. The vignettes in the game allowed for hypothetical scenarios to be played out, while also leaving space for participants to share any actual experiences they had had that resembled these scenarios. The rationale will be further explored in the next sections.

### **3.1 Theoretical background and rationale**

Trust is at the foundation of family research, and research with children (Christensen and James, 2017; Davies, 2017; Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2017). Trust allows the researcher to enter some very private spaces and to pose questions which might yield more emotive responses than expected (Roberts, 2017) and even in some cases, the interview might lead to participants divulging family secrets or talking about subjects that the family considers too private to discuss with stranger (Davies, 2017). Trust is also crucial when working with children, not only to gain access, but also to get answers from children that might otherwise not be accessible. Livingstone and Blum-Ross, for example, recount an instance where they built up rapport and trust with a teenage participant over multiple meetings, and saw different sides of the participant's character throughout (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2017).

However, as seen from the work of Roberts (2017) there are many challenges in interviewing children, and the presence of the parents may sometimes be detrimental rather than supportive. Factoring for social desirability is an aspect of research that all social scientists must engage with (Bryman, 2012) but for interviews with children, it is a central issue, as the young participant might feel obliged to “perform” a certain role to both researcher and parent (Davies, 2017). A common theme in papers concerning the ethics of interviewing children and families seems to suggest that trust is key, that the researcher must take into account what is being said, and what is observed, while trusting participants (Bryman, 2012, Roberts, 2017, Davies, 2017).

In fact, the family group interview requires trust to be established twice – once between the parent and researcher (Davies, 2017); and then once more, between the researcher and the child, over the course of mediated meetings (Davies, 2017). Context matters in studying an intergenerational relationship (Christensen, 2004, Mason and Tipper, 2008, James, 2013, cited in Davies, 2017).

A further challenge is posed by the nature of social research itself. The field has come a long way in recognising children as autonomous participants, capable of constructing their own knowledge, and experts in their own experience (Roberts, 2017) and researchers recognise that failure to do so can be detrimental to a project (Davies, 2017). However, as Roberts points out, “hearing” children's voices is still something researchers are working on – as with the family group interview, there are no set guidelines, no golden rules to working with children, and thus there is

a danger of children's voices being sanitised, a "tool for the adult armoury" (Roberts, 2017:143). Traditional methods of research, which rely on the adults to "make sense of" the interview, to "translate" the children's words, has not been helpful in that regard – which is why it was important for the researcher to include a creative aspect of the interview; an activity which would allow the younger participants more freedom of expression, as well as an opportunity to subvert some of the expectations the adults might have had of them prior to the interview.

"Creativity is needed to drive forward research methods for children and this is likely to come about in relation to remixing and mess."

Yamada-Rice, 2017:83

The game element of the interview allowed more opportunities to build rapport between the participants and the researcher. Given the limited time the researcher had in interacting with participants, it was deemed that an activity such as a game would allow for more discussion.

Having laid out the theoretical background of the final research method, the next section will look at the sample size, method of recruitment, and the organisations engaged along the way.

### **3.2 Sample and method of recruitment**

This section will explain the rationale for the sample size, method of recruitment, and the organisations that the researcher engaged with during fieldwork. It will start with the gatekeeper interviews and volunteering that the researcher worked with in order to build up research networks, before explaining how the families were recruited and what the final sample was like. The section will end with a brief discussion who this research helps and why.

#### **3.2.1 Volunteering and gatekeeper interviews**

In order to build networks necessary to conduct this project, the researcher engaged with her local community and volunteered at both local and national organisations that worked with children. The purpose of this stakeholder engagement was twofold: to help the researcher in finalising the methodology she would ultimately use, and to help her develop the necessary networks needed to recruit families with children. Given the challenges outlined in the previous section, and the importance of trust-building, this aspect of the fieldwork was indispensable to the final success of the thesis.

During Phases One and Two of the fieldwork the researcher volunteered in the following organisations: the Jiu Jitsu Foundation (founded in 1969), The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI, founded in 1971), Childline (founded in 1986), and the Cheylesmore Community Centre (founded in 1939). These organisations were chosen because of previous connections the researcher had in them, because of their histories, and because they allowed her to move into the circles that their potential research participants might move in as well. They also had different reaches – local (Cheylesmore Community Centre), national (TJJF and Childline), and international (SCBWI) – thus maximising the researcher's chances of finding participants. Each organisation has a diverse membership, and works with children in some way. Engaging with these NGOs allowed the researcher to gain important training and experience in interacting and working with families. The organisations also supported the researcher by having informal discussions with them and helping guide their approach to recruitment and research design.

The voluntary work took different forms: volunteering at events (SCBWI), working shifts as an online counsellor and fundraising (Childline/the NSPCC), working as an administrator and a community development officer (the community centre where many of the phase two interviews were held) and serving as assistant at children's training events (the British Jiu Jitsu Foundation). The ways in which the research benefitted from this work are numerous: for example, many of the families were met through SCBWI events; people from the Jiu Jitsu Foundation who had experience working with children helped test out the game, and gave a lot of useful feedback; and the volunteer work at Childline allowed the researcher to speak to the campaign manager of Share Aware, the NSPCC's initiative to support families in teaching children about social media.

During the later stages of the volunteering, the researcher got ethical permission to conduct gatekeeper interviews with administrators and group leaders from the Cheylesmore Community Centre. To gain permission to do the interviews, the researcher agreed to also ask the participants about their overall experiences of working with the centre, which exposed many interesting themes that were not there in the first place. (For a full list of the questions asked, please see Appendix One.)

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with eight gatekeepers, including managers and administrators at the centre, centre trustees, group leaders, and people who worked in local government. These gatekeepers talked about their challenges in engaging with local

families, how they overcame those challenges, and what they thought the biggest concerns regarding children and the Internet were. Following the interviews, the gatekeepers also introduced the researcher into some of their groups, including: a local group for senior citizens that had an interest in learning more about social media technologies, and a local church with many children who were at an age where they were just beginning to use social media. These introductions gave the researcher additional opportunities to discuss her project and interact with potential participants.

### **3.2.2 Family group interviews: sample makeup and size**

The families interviewed for this thesis were recruited using a combination of two methods: the contacts developed through the first two phases of the fieldwork, and a snowballing method. Some were already in contact with the researcher, while others were recruited after existing participants told them about the project. Eleven families took part: sixteen adults and twenty-two children (full list of nicknames in Appendix 5).

The families interviewed were single- or two-parent households, with at least one of the two parents being in full-time employment, and at last one of the two parents being educated at a university level. The children's ages ranged from 4 to 15. Three families lived in the South West region, three - in the greater London area, one in the Peak District, and four in the Midlands. Parents from three of the families interviewed were first-generation migrants to the UK. Either one or both parents were present during the interview, while the children either stayed for all of it, or parts of it. Further breakdown of who attended and who did not is in Appendix 5.

### **3.3 Family group interview design**

The family group interview took place over two stages with each group of participants. During the first stage, participants were asked questions about their social media usage and their conceptualisations of risk and trust. The second stage was a vignette-based game, designed to study participants' responses to different online threat scenarios and how the family practices manifested in that environment. In addition to recording the interview on a dictaphone, the researcher also took notes on the family members' behaviours, how they interacted with one another, and how their comfort levels changed throughout the course of the interview. These notes were later used to develop the analysis further.

### 3.3.1 Questions about technology, risk and trust

The first stage data were gathered using a semi-structured interview method. The questions were designed to elicit responses from participants about their perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies, what platforms and devices they use, and what factors were instrumental in their choice of platforms and devices. Participants were given the opportunity to share their thoughts in their own words, with prompting questions being asked by the researcher when appropriate. While clarifications were given, there were some cases where a participant's body language or verbal answer implied that they would rather not be interrogated further on what they had shared. This reluctance could be explained by the subject matter or by the interview setting, however, it was crucial not to make participants feel pressured to give answers that they did not want to give.

#### **Interview Questions Part I: Social Media, Risk and Trust**

1. What does social media mean to you?
2. What platforms / sites do you use, or used to use (including video games with chat functions)? How did you choose them?
3. What electronic devices do you/did you use?
4. What aspects of social media are you most comfortable with? What aspects do you enjoy?
5. What aspects of social media are you anxious about? What makes you say that?

#### **Interview Questions Part II: Debrief Questions (to be asked as time allows)**

1. How do you feel about social media after playing this game? What makes you say that?
2. Which parts did you find the easiest? What about the hardest ones?
3. What sorts of questions would you have asked, if you had a do-over?
4. Which, if any, of the cards reflected your own experience with social media?
5. If these situations really occurred online, what would you have done differently?
6. Why/why didn't you put more cards to the family?

The first set of questions aimed to clarify how participants conceptualise social media. As seen in the literature review, the term is broad and can mean different things for different people.

The questions helped the researcher understand better what levels of experience participants had and how they used social media. The first one was posed in a way that invited unstructured reflection: “Just to get started, can you tell me a little bit about what social media means to you?” The idea was to encourage participants to talk as freely as possible, and to see what associations they made about social media.

Questions two and three were more factual, focused on eliciting more specific information about the participants’ social media usage and the levels of their technical understanding and sophistication.

Questions four and five (in the first grouping) aimed to elicit more specific answers about the participants’ perceptions of risk and trust, and the way those perceptions shaped their social media practices. The questions were designed to be as open-ended , allowing participants to once again speak as much or as little as possible about the aspects of social media they were the most or the least comfortable with.

Questions in the second group were intended as debrief and related directly to the game played (which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.) Due to time constraints of the interview, not all of them could have been asked. but almost all groups shared how they felt after playing the game, and almost all had a chance to answer the question pertaining to what they would have done different, if they played the game again. A few also answered the question why they didn’t pose more questions to the family, but the main constraint for posing all the questions from the second group to the participants was time. Many children were tired and distracted by the one-hour-mark, which made the groups less willing to engage with the questions.

### **3.3.2. Second stage – block or go along game**

The second stage of the interview comprised of a game designed to simulate a social media environment. Using vignette-style questions, it presented participants with a series of scenarios where their goal was to decide whether they wanted to talk to a new online contact, or to block them. The result was a role-play type game that allowed both parents and children to walk through what different social media scenarios might look like for each of them.

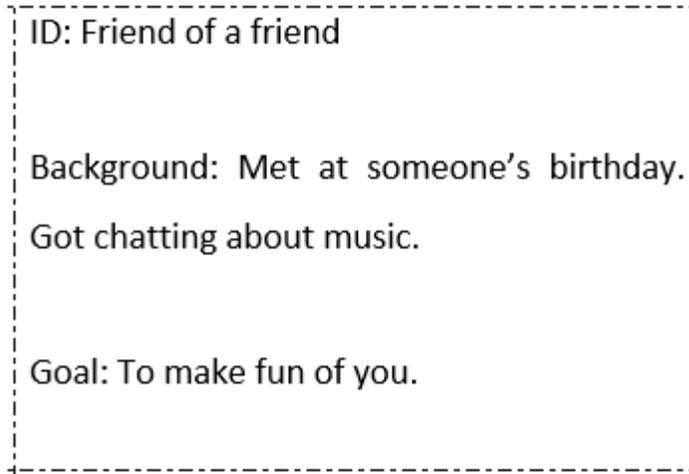
The game was developed following the gatekeeper interviews. One of the main themes what arose from those discussions what the difficulty adults had of conceptualising what “trust on

social media” meant to them. Another one of the themes that was relevant for the development of the game was how “risk on social media” was always conceptualised by gatekeepers as coming from strangers – even though, as the literature review has shown, that is not always the case. Thus, the idea of using role-play in the interview came about.

The scenarios on the cards were inspired from different sources – some of them were imagined by the researcher, others were inspired from the books and articles collected in Phase Two of the research, as background reading for this thesis. A lot of books written in the last five years, marketed towards middle-grade and young adults readers, contained scenarios that used social media in multiple ways – friends connecting, friends falling out, strangers having harmless conversations, identity impersonation, etc. In some cases, the cards showed the same ID and back story, but had different goals (like, a friend of a friend might contact someone to chat, and then the next time, the card would say the goal would be bullying.) This was done to keep some variety into the game and to get the participants thinking more critically about the scenarios they could encounter. However, the researcher decided not to include any sexually explicit or violent scenarios in the cards, to minimise the risk of psychological stress to the participants. For a full list of the books and the role social media played in them, please see Appendix 4.

Game development and testing occurred in September 2017. Testing was done with a group of people from the Jiu Jitsu Foundation – some of who had younger relatives, others who worked with young children. Feedback was given verbally and through observation of the people playing the game. Initially, the cards included an identification (ID) and a tick or a cross to indicate whether the person was meant to be safe or not. Following feedback from the test group, more of the story was added to the cards, as well as a “goal” that the person drawing the card was meant to work towards. This was done so that the players would have more information about the characters they were meant to play.

Below is an example of the cards. A full list of scenarios can be found in Appendix 3.



*Figure 1: Example of a card given to a participant*

The above is an example of what the player drawing the card would see. They would then choose someone to read the ID and background to. That person would then have three questions to ask to determine whether the card was safe or not. The player who drew the card would have to answer depending on the goal they were given. For example:

JOAO (child, 10): ID, friend of a friend, background, met up with you and your friend when you were out and about

MARIA (mother): if it's on LinkedIn, I'm happy to do it.

RESEARCHER (researcher): (pause) what was the goal?

JOAO (child, 10): keep on chatting

MARIA(mother): yeah so excellent

Except, Peres family interview

In total, the 11 families played out 122 scenarios (not counting the ones where a scenario was posed to the researcher) with 36 cards. Of the 122 scenarios, 74 were posed to children and 48 were posed to adults, which is reflective of the overall the sample (38 participants, 16 adults and 22 children), although within groups, some parents did more scenarios than the children. The adult to child ratio in the interview did not seem to affect how many scenarios the adults and children did – it was a case of how participants wanted to do the game.

As stated earlier, the game achieved several objectives, the chief of which is helping the researcher build rapport with their participants. It also helped the researcher explore difficult topics with the participants without making the participants uncomfortable or causing them psychological distress. The participants had more control on the flow of information as well – the importance of which will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4. Positionality and reflexivity**

Qualitative research, by its nature, rejects the idea of an unbiased, objective researcher (Bryman, 2008). Each person is impacted by their individual background and experiences, and that affects the ways in which they interact with others (and the ways in which others interact with them). As Fitzpatrick and Olson demonstrate, the emotional demands placed on a researcher during qualitative fieldwork can be both a barrier and a resource (2015), and as such it is necessary to be aware of the researcher's positionality, feelings, and motivations.

Roni Berger (2015) examined three different ways in which a researcher could experience reflexivity – studying the familiar, studying something while also becoming part of the community, and studying the unfamiliar. In the case of this research project, however, the researcher was placed between those categories – her experiences growing up with social media in a specific environment influenced her expectations and approaches to the fieldwork. At the same time the researcher had none of the experiences of a parent. Thus, she experienced both advantages and disadvantages from studying something that is both familiar and not. As a Caucasian woman living in the United Kingdom, the researcher had opportunities to travel to conduct their research. As a PhD candidate in a prestigious university, the researcher had the benefit not only of social class, but of higher education as well. In the interview context, she was perceived as “expert” and as helpful source for the families.

That said, these same privileges could be seen by others as an impediment. In some communities, despite her work and volunteering, the researcher was not able to gain access. In many cases, the researcher obtained access because she was ‘vetted’ by a friend of the family, not because she was introduced by a community centre gatekeeper or a teacher. Although the researcher obtained a CRB check, none of the families interviewed asked to see it. Many participants were of the same socio-economic background as the researcher. In analysing some of

their field notes, the researcher observed how often her own experiences in learning about the digital world were replicated across the interviews, but how often casual conversations with potential participants diverged (many people who expressed discomfort with the digital world were interested in taking part, but then did not follow through.) While other factors could have been at play, it is possible that the researcher's own bias contributed.

Finally, when thinking about working with children, it was imperative for the researcher to consider what her presence in the family home means and how it impacted the data she gathered (Davies, 2017, Roberts, 2017, Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2017). As the literature has shown, access is not about gaining physical entry to a family home – it is gaining the trust of each family member. A parent's permission to interview the children did not guarantee that the children themselves would be happy with talking to the researcher, and other writers have described their experiences of having to play different "roles" in order to gain the trust of their participants (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2017).

In the case of this project, the researcher often found herself cast as "the comedy person" (as described by one mother): the one whose handbag made funny sounds (because the buzzer used in the game could not be switched off), the one who made jokes about "forgetting her English" when she became nervous, or got confused; the one who sometimes had to make silly faces in order to get the younger children laughing. The casting was involuntary at first, but it helped with getting some of the younger participants to engage with the interview. Of course, that was not always possible and there were cases where children left the room regardless of what the researcher did. However, those who did participate were willing to give the researcher a chance to entertain and engage them. Humour also appeared to increase interest in the research process, as it created helped with rapport-building and humanised the researcher in ways with other kinds of sharing did not. This experience reflected some of Brené Brown's own findings (2017, 2018) in that sharing without an understanding of what is appropriate (or boundaries) in a given situation creates a "false connection".

The parents tended to cast the researcher as "expert", talking to her as if she was an authority on social media. There were instances in the interview where the researcher was asked to explain what privacy online is, or how social media companies make money, or to offer words of comfort to a participant who was becoming distraught. On other occasions, children who would

appear upset when talking about cyberbullying and their concerns that it might happen to them; or parents who would be concerned about strangers online but would not know how to express that in the interview. In cases such as these, it helped to have the researcher give an opinion about how, for example, a good community of friends can look after each other, or why it is important to set interpersonal boundaries with people online (“if someone is mean, you should block them”). The “expert” and the “comedy person” roles were used multiple times in interviews although it was the participants who gave the researcher her cue about when to adopt each one.

While it is not possible to account for all the ways in which an individual’s circumstances or personality can impact upon their thesis (Woodthorpe, 2010) it remains important to acknowledge the importance of researcher positionality and how it might contribute to, or impede, the project (Fitzpatrick and Olson, 2015). It is also important to acknowledge what is possible, what is worth pursuing, and what could have a negative impact on the researcher and her home institution. In the next section, focusing on ethics, will expound more on the potential risks to participants and the researcher, and how they were mitigated.

## **5. Ethics**

Full ethical review was undertaken and granted by the Royal Holloway Ethics Committee in the Summer of 2018. A copy of the form submitted to the committee can be found in Appendix Eight. A copy of the call for participants can be found in Appendix Six.

Before, during, and after the interview, participants underwent a multi-step process of self-selection. Participation was not negotiated between a parent and the researcher: the parents who made contact discussed participation first among themselves, and then with their children (Davies, 2017). There were cases where the researcher contacted participants who expressed initial interest but dropped out because their partner and/or children refused to take part. There were cases where children chose not to take part on the day of the interview or decided to leave the room after a few minutes because they were bored or thought the discussion had nothing to do with them. And while none of the participants requested for their information to be removed after the interview took part, they are all given the option and were contacted with updates as soon as their transcripts were ready.

The researcher made a point about explaining what participation meant to all family members prior to the interview – by sending an information sheet, and then on the day, with the family, in a language that was clear and explained consent so that all the family members understood it. Consent was obtained verbally and in writing. Once the results were written up, the researcher also sent a participant brief to their points of contact, and then once more as well as they were preparing to submit the thesis, in order to give all parties an opportunity to comment while the researcher was still able to make changes.

In terms of the anonymity of the family, all data from the interviews was anonymised during the transcription process, removing any information that might identify the participants and their families. Original records were kept in a password-protected folder, and only made available to the researcher and her supervisors. No hard copies of the data containing any identifying information were made available. Any data used in write-ups, in the thesis or other articles, was anonymised.

In terms of wellbeing, although the questions and the activities in the interviews were not focusing on topics that are distressing, there was always a risk that the conversation can turn to a distressing topic. Participants were not pressured into talking about topics that they found difficult and if, at any point, the researcher sensed that they are uncomfortable she reiterated that they do not have to answer the question. To reduce the chances of causing undue psychological distress to parents and children, the researcher kept the interview and game topics to vague threats rather than including sexually explicit scenarios or scenarios that involved explicit threats of violence. Special attention was paid to both verbal and non-verbal cues from the children.

Participants were given additional information on online safety, some that was targeted towards parents and some that was more appropriate for children. They were also given the details of an appropriate mental health service (Childline or Samaritans) if the conversation raised any topics that they find distressing and want to discuss with a professional. The researcher's training as a councillor did not qualify her to give them mental health support but it would have been helpful if they experienced any acute distress and need to process difficult emotions during the interview. In such cases the interview would have been paused or cut short and participants would have been asked if they want to withdraw. Throughout the recruitment process, the researcher made sure that participants knew that they can withdraw at any point without giving a reason.

Special attention was given to both verbal and non-verbal cues with the younger participants. If a child appeared reticent or hesitant, or stopped talking, the researcher did not push them to answer a question or get involved in an activity. If the parent appeared reticent, the researcher tried to encourage them with some questions, if it seemed appropriate; however, the researcher was weary of posing too many questions as inter-family dynamics are complex and not always obvious, as there might have been reasons why a parent would not want to discuss a topic in front of their children or their partner. The researcher used silence or a non-committal comment (such as: “That sounds...” or “Seems interesting”) as encouragement for them to carry on talking, which gave participants sufficient opportunity to change the topic without refusing to answer.

As mentioned earlier, participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any point before, during or after the interview process, up to the final submission of the thesis. They were offered to read the transcripts, or to read a summary of findings when they were done – all chose to read the summary rather than the transcripts. Only one participant asked for something not to be included in the transcript, which was the sound effect of a toy they were playing with at the time.

No questions were raised about the funding of the project, which came from the Leverhulme Trust. From a funding perspective there are no conflicts of interest to report and no issues that impact the families participating, and the children especially.

## **6. Analysis**

This section will explain the data analysis undertaken. It will start with the thematic analysis undertaken of both gatekeeper interviews and Family group interviews, before moving onto the analysis of the game portion of the interview. The section will include a few screenshots from the coding and the analysis process.

Most interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim, with the names of the participants anonymised. Two of the gatekeepers interviewed during Phase Two declined having their interviews recorded, which the researcher accommodated. The data were anonymised upon transcript, and any identifying details were removed from the final text. Participants were

given the option to read the transcript once it was finished, which all of them declined in favour of receiving a short write-up of the results, which the researcher was happy to provide.

Due to external circumstances, the researcher had to delay her submission to a date that was significantly later from what she initially told participants. As such, the write up of the results was first sent to the families by post in 2018, and then once again via their preferred mode of online communication (either Facebook messaging or email) in 2020 as the researcher was preparing to submit the thesis for examination. This was done as to ensure that participants had an opportunity to raise objections while the researcher was still able to make changes to the document, as well as to accommodate any last-minute changes of heart the participants might have had about their engagement. However, in both cases, the participants did not get in touch to request any changes to the thesis.

The researcher undertook a two-step approach to analysing the data. First, she used her research journal to write up notes on the fieldwork, including details on the family, the environment in which the interview took place, whether there were any situational cues that added more dimension to the data or not (such as body language, tone of voice, how comfortable the participants appeared with each other). The research journal was also used to record any overarching themes that the researcher had noticed emerging over the course of the interview, before any coding and transcription took place. This helped not only with the analysis, but also with estimating when data had reached a point of saturation (Saunders *et al.*, 2018).

The second step of the analysis began with the process of transcription, where the researcher took care not only to capture the statements of the participants, but also to include as many non-verbal cues into the written-up version of the data. This included elements like the participant's tone of voice, whether an exchange had been playful or serious, and whether the participants' body language appeared to contradict their statement (if the researcher had taken note of this in her journal). By undergoing this process of transcribing their data, the researcher was better able to approach the coding and the ensuing thematic analysis, because it allowed her to get to know the data better.

Coding itself was done in several stages, using NVivo software. During this part of the process, the researcher studied the data multiple times, taking note of any recurring ideas or interesting statements, before looking through the resulting code structure for any common themes.

In some cases, those themes corresponded to phenomena that was already analysed in the literature review – such as cyberbullying and fear of grooming. In others, the themes appeared unique – such as the case with self-gatekeeping practices, which will be explored in Chapter Six.

In cases where the researcher could not find mentions to a theme in the literature she had read at the time, she re-examined academic journals and traditional media for references. An example of one such post-fieldwork reimagining of the literature review was the code on “social media addiction”. While there had not been any reference in the literature to that kind of addiction as a diagnosable illness, it was a phenomenon that participants would allude to in the interview, and, after further study, the researcher was able to trace to traditional media articles. This process of post-hoc literature referencing allowed the researcher to identify the themes and codes that were truly unique about the data.

With each pass the researcher took through her transcripts, she also consulted her supervisory team, and incorporated advice and guidance as appropriate. At this stage of the process, it would have been useful to involve the participants in the process of code validation, in a manner similar to that described by Jonsen and Jehn in discussing the use of triangulation to validate thematic analysis (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009). However, due to the participants’ stated desire not to be involved in the research beyond the interview, that was not an avenue to validation that was available at the time. Instead, the researcher used her discussions with her supervisory team, as well as other informal consultations with other, more experienced researchers in her field, to inform the validity of her coding.

There were numerous initial coding strands, ranging from factual notes to notes about feelings. Some of those strands stood as nodes of their own – such as “Fear of Missing Out”, which was both something that participants talked about, and something that appeared in other statements that participants made, such as how they decided what social media apps they used. Once the initial reading of the text was finalised, the codes were then narrowed down to more manageable lengths, to the point where the relationships between different themes and codes could be visualised. Figure Two represents an overview of that initial coding.

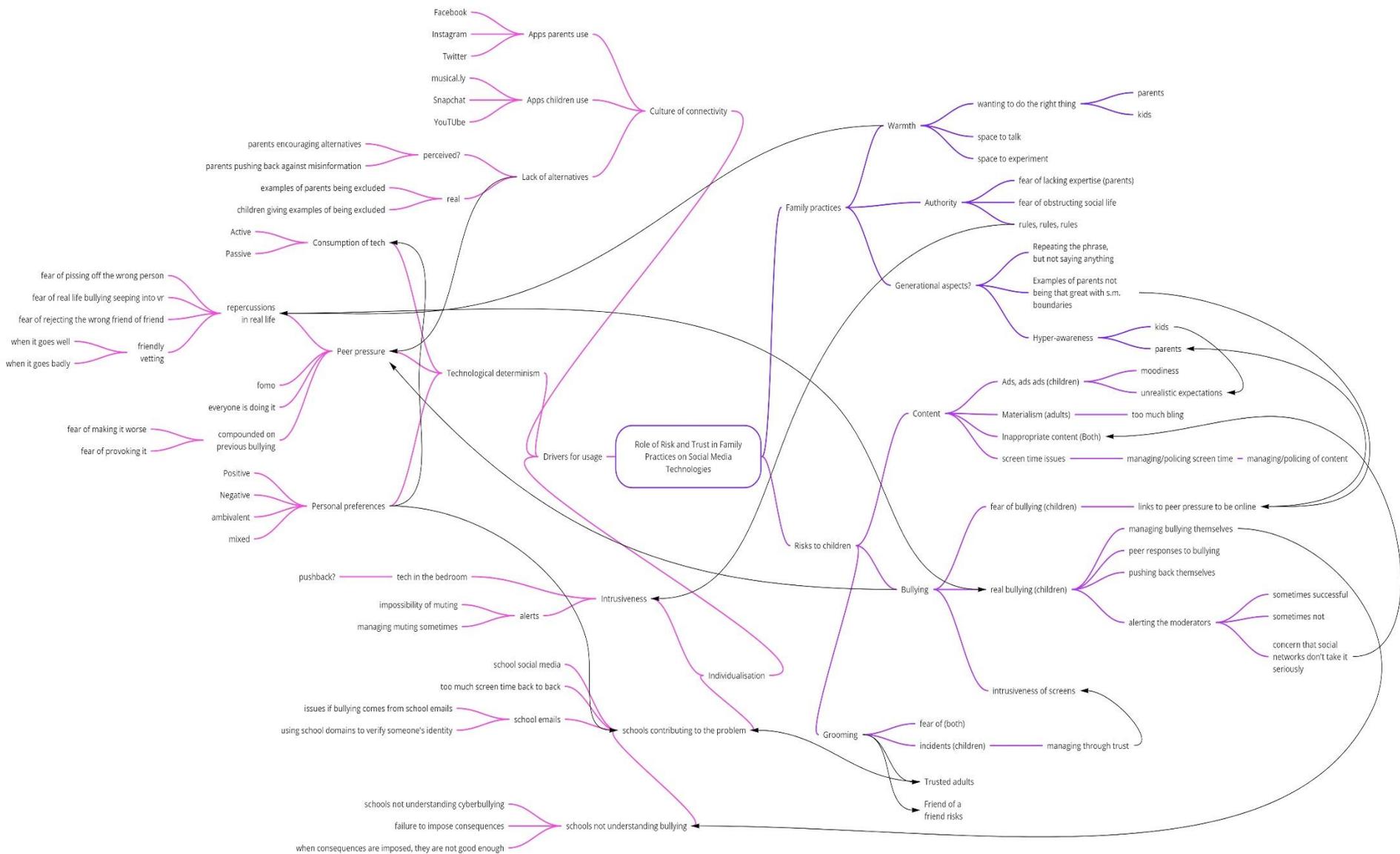


Figure 2: Overview of final coding

Organising certain ideas into themes was not always as tidy as the researcher hoped, as reflected in Figure Two. At the same time, the coding did reflect the nature of the data itself – where multiple participants often tried to weigh in, sometimes talking over each other, and trying to express their opinions in a way that would not be perceived as “undesirable”.

Because of the size and scope of the coding tree, obtaining a high-resolution image of the figure proved to be difficult. As such, the next figures will represent several closeups of the nodes, demonstrating the transition from code to theme.



Figure 3: Close up of a data theme (Family Practices)

Figure Three shows a close up of the theme on Family Practices. The sub-themes of warmth, authority, and generationalism came from the literature, and were used to name some of the trends that the researcher had identified from the data. For example, both children and parents gave examples that could be described as hyper-awareness of how they were perceived on social media. This included quotes like: “...but I hope that these guys (the children) that we can learn stuff together although they’ll be miles ahead of me” (Josephine, mother, Marigold family interview). The above quote was also coded as an example of “fear of lacking expertise”, which can be found under the theme of authority.

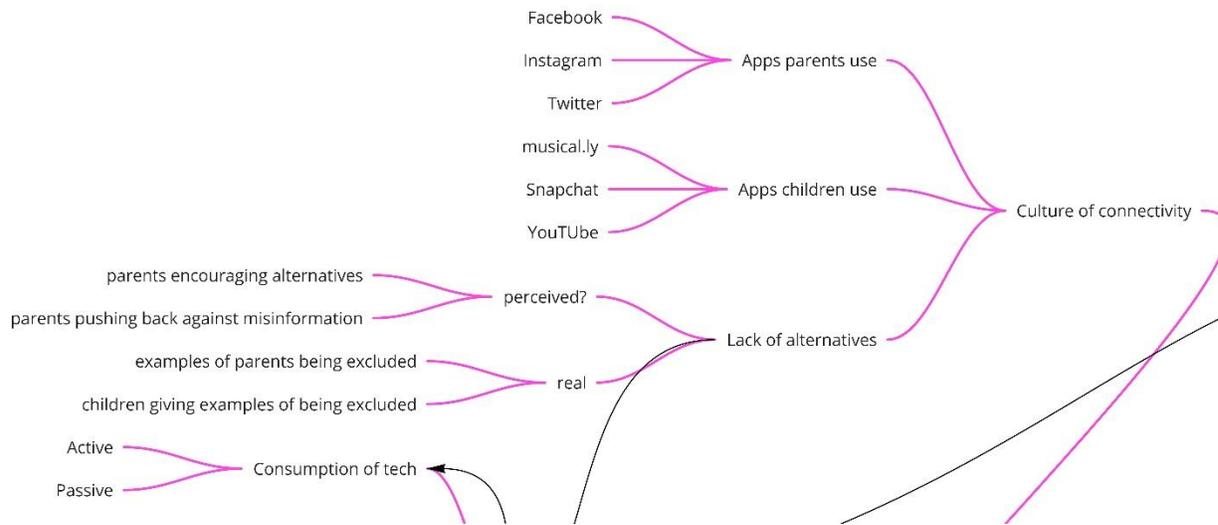


Figure 4: Close up of a data theme (Culture of connectivity)

Figure Four represents a close up of another branch of the coding tree, the culture of connectivity, which was connected to the broader question pertaining to “Drivers of Usage” along with technological determinism and individualisation. This branch includes interview codes that will be discussed in chapters four and five, including, but not limited to: the applications (apps) that both children and adults use, the meanings they ascribe to those social media platforms, and the reasons why participants did not perceive there to be any alternatives to them. Examples of those codes include instances in the interview where a father might talk about missing out on gatherings with friends because he did not check his Facebook, or a child might talk about being embarrassed because she had to give out her mother’s mobile number instead of her own.

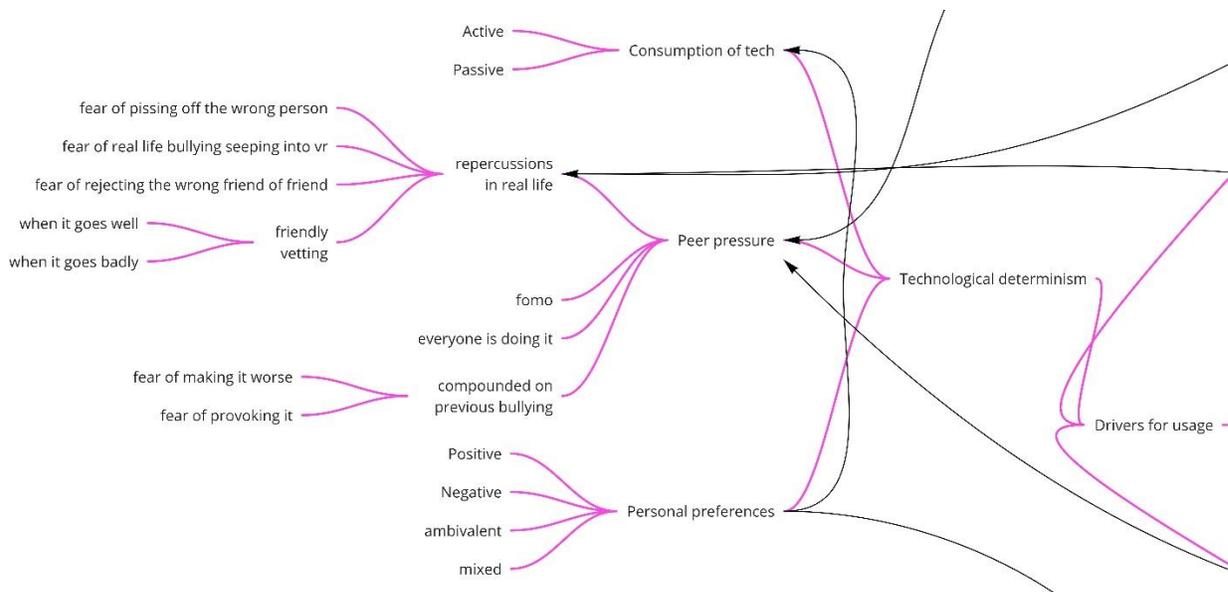


Figure 5: Close up of a data theme (Technological determinism)

As with “culture of connectivity”, technological determinism was also a theme that connected to the broader question of drivers for usage, and it was one of the richer themes, as seen from Figure Five. It includes codes that will be discussed in more detail in all four empirical chapters, including the active and passive consumption of technology (Chapters Three and Four), peer pressure (Chapter Five) and the personal attitudes and motivations of participants (Chapters Three, Four, and Six). A lot of the sub-themes and codes from the technological determinism branch overlapped with ones from other parts of the coding tree – for example, the code “repercussions in real life” also connected to the code on “lack of alternatives” from Figure Four. Indeed, social exclusion turned out to be a theme of its own, regardless of whether it took the form of passive neglect or active bullying. Social exclusion therefore became one of the key themes that were explored in Chapter Five of this thesis.

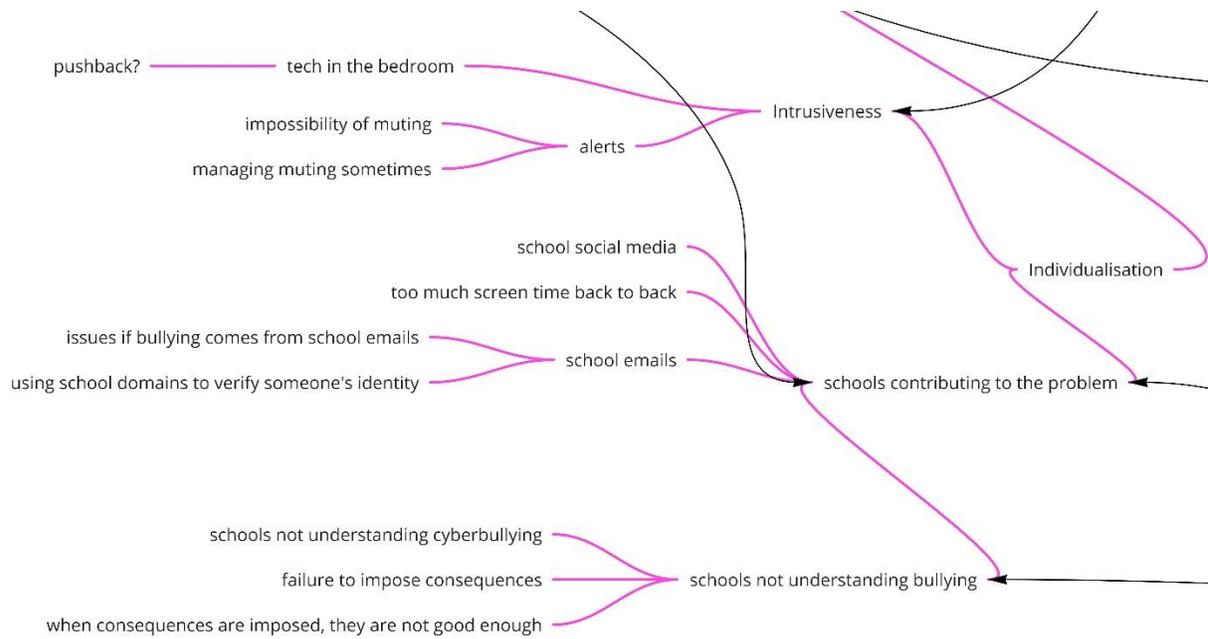


Figure 6: Close up of a data theme (Individualisation)

Figure Six shows a close up of the branch of individualisation. This theme encompasses many of the factors driving a person-centric view of risk on social media, as opposed to a more community-based approach. Whenever participants spoke about feeling like they were constantly available to their friends, or that they were always receiving notifications of ongoing conversation, those quotes were coded under “intrusiveness” and its sub-codes. School environments were also coded under the theme of individualisation, as participants frequently brought up the perceived lack of leadership, guidance, and help on the part of educators as a reason for their approach to social media technologies. Because of the role that schools also played in the children’s socialisation, the sub-theme of schools contributing to the problem was often tied in the data with the themes of bullying, peer pressure, lack of alternatives, and parental warmth.

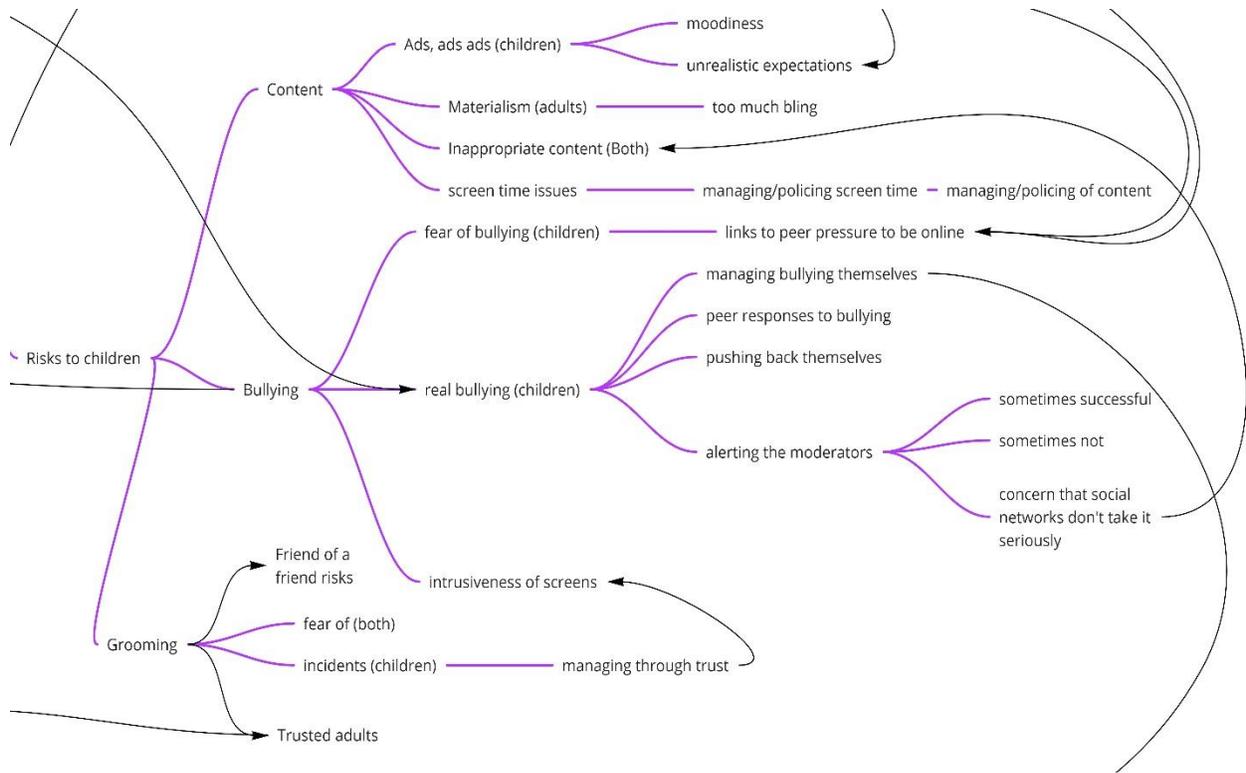


Figure 7: Close up of a data theme (Risks to children)

Finally, Figure Seven depicts a close up of the “risk to children” data theme, which contained three main branches – grooming, bullying, and content (both appropriate and inappropriate). The branch titled “grooming” was perhaps the least populated one, as participants did not disclose many such incidents in great detail. The codes that tied in with this branch predominately pertained to instances where participants expressed their anxiety and fear of strangers. Where children did allude to unpleasant experiences online, they talked about managing them quickly and with the help of their parents, which is why that code often tied with family practices and warmth.

Far more detailed were the coding trees on bullying and content, both of which were risk that the participating families had experienced on multiple instances. While the researcher anticipated bullying to be a major theme in the data, she did not expect the same to be the case of the content that the families saw themselves as consuming. These two branches of the coding tree provided the impetus to separate perceptions of social media platforms and social media users into their individual subsections in chapter three, as they illustrated in great detail the difference in trust that parents and children had in each.

It is worth noting that figures three through seven represent the tidiest version of the coding tree that the researcher worked with while writing the empirical findings of this project. Early versions of that coding structure included multiple branches overlapping each other, codes being duplicated under different themes and subthemes, and codes being made into themes of their own, only to be removed in later drafts when the additional analysis did not yield any new information. As stated earlier in this section, the initial chaos of the coding reflected the nature of the data itself – participants would circle back to a theme or think of something as the conversation had moved on; children would chime in with observations as they occurred to them; and on two occasions at least a child that had left the interview early on returned towards the end to give their opinion on a question that had already been discussed. The messiness and occasional disorganisation of the family group interview was sometimes a source of embarrassment to the parents, but ultimately added to the texture of the data, reflecting the differences in how children received and processed information, even within the same family.

Despite the difficulty, the researcher was able to assign the various nodes to the respective literature themes to ensure that an appropriate chapter structure could be followed. The empirical chapters will be looking at those themes and how they relate to the main research questions. However, the researcher undertook a different approach to analysing the data from the game, using the code “vignettes”. This code was useful because it helped the researcher note which strands overlapped a lot between one set of data and the other set of data. It was also helpful in identifying the parts of the data where the game added more to the question and answer data.

Once scenarios were singled out, they were then entered into Excel and colour-coded depending on whether they were low-, medium-, or high-risk (light blue, medium blue, dark blue) using the researcher’s initial guide. Then the answers for each family were inputted and colour-coded depending on how each participant responded (red - block, yellow - allow with caution, or green - allow). As not all participants got to play with all the cards, in some of the rows the fields of the matrix were left blank. However, the researcher also used the fields to note whether the person answering was an adult or a child. Once that sorting of the vignettes was done, and the researcher was able to observe the data for overarching trends, she was able to apply thematic analysis to scenarios that were representative of the overall answering pattern, as well as to answers that seemed to deviate from it.

As mentioned in the section pertaining to the game design, the scenarios were written with those factors in mind, in order for the participants to explore what trust and risk on social media mean to them. Figure Eight shows the colour legend used. Figures Nine, Ten, and Eleven give a broad look at the data.

	Obvious threat in card		
	Non-obvious threat, situational		
	Unthreatening		
	Continued conversation without reserve		
	Continued conversation with reserve; or hide/mute		
	Blocked		
	KB got it		

Figure 8: Colour legend from vignettes

Figure 9: Overarching screengrab of scenario coding.

	Bully schoolmate	Friendly schoolmate, not knowing each other well	Friend-of-a-friend, bully, party	Friend-of-a-friend, party, nice person	Childhood friend, catch up	Childhood friend, catfish
Marigold	Child (9) got this. Blocked right away.		Child (13) got it. Asked id questions. Did not block until			Mother got it. Asking for information only the
Hope		Child (4) got it. Said no at first then yes.				
Lys	Child (12) got it. Blocked immediately.	Child (14) got it. Checked followers then went along.	Child (14) got it. Cross-referenced. Went along. Mother got it.	Child (14) got it. Cross-referenced with friends. Child (15) got it. Asked for advice, cross-referenced,	Mother got it. Bit wary. Said they would allow a follow.	Went along without much verification. Child (15) got it. Blocked after questions did
Mehta	Child (15) got it. Asked why. Blocked.	Child (15) got it. Asked some ID questions. Went along.	Tried to be polite but then blocked.	Child (15) got it. Asked for advice, cross-referenced,	KB got it. Went along after checking.	Father got it. Lots of back and forth and personal
Gordon		KB got it. Bit of back and forth then said yes.				

Figure 10: Close-up of codification

	Marigold	Hope
Bully schoolmate	Child (9) got this. Blocked right away.	
Parent of a schoolmate, you wrote something mean, wants to argue		
Childhood friend, catfish	Mother got it. Asking for information only the person would know, put it to the family, got same advice. Blocked in the end.	
Teacher, catfish		Child (4) went along.
Stranger, TV personality, catfish		Father got it. Ignore then eventually block.

Figure 11: Screenshot from scenarios, excerpt, taken after the table was pivoted.

This method of analysing the game results was useful for several reasons. First, it was a quick way for the researcher to evaluate how participants tended to answer the scenarios – whether they were more or less cautious, whether levels of familiarity or levels of threat tended to impact their decisions, and whether parents and children gave different answers. Second, it was a useful

method to create a tally of the frequency of blocking versus allowing the interaction, not just for the entire cohort, but also by group, which proved useful in the analysis.

## **7. Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study, the biggest of which is the homogeneity of the participant sample. Parents were all educated; with at least one parent employed; most families were Caucasian and able to send their children to schools with a good digital literacy programme; and all families had had some conversations around social media and online safety, suggesting that the parents were involved in their children's lives and eager to support them. This sample was the result of the snowballing recruitment method – while the researcher did not set out to interview a homogenous sample, the families that were interviewed were the only ones who were interested in participating.

While it is true that family group interviews can create an environment where children might feel pressured to respond in a certain way, or indeed, have their voices taken away by their parents, that was not the case in this project. The children either began the interview animated and engaged, or became so over the course of the questions. Family members spoke for equal amounts of time and gave each other turns to speak.

There is another limitation that needs to be expanded upon at this stage of the thesis as well, and it is the decision to use a roleplaying game as part of the family group interview. While the choice was justified earlier in this chapter, there are nonetheless caveats to the data that are collected through this method.

The first limitation to the game method is the format itself: while roleplaying games are not new, this exact format was not familiar to any of the participants and thus it was possible that they would not understand the goal of the game. This was a reasonable concern, as the concept of “trust” online was something that the gatekeepers struggled with in the first and second phases of the research. Having stated that, in the fieldwork participants rarely struggled with comprehending the rules of the game, and often offered ideas about how the game could be developed in the future.

Another limitation is with the data itself: as those are simulated scenarios, it is not possible to say to what extent the participants' responses reflect their thoughts processes if they faced an

actual situation like that in their social media practices. Sometimes, in the course of playing the game, family members disclosed if they had faced a similar scenario – after observing it being played out, or after getting it themselves. However, that was not always the case and as such, the data comes with a caveat that it is about a simulated scenario, not a real one.

The aim of the game was to talk about hypothetical scenarios and giving participants a chance to work through some potentially negative experiences in a neutral environment. It is also worth remembering that the original intents of using a game were to allow the participants to control the flow of information, thus participating in the co-creation of knowledge. With the constraints of each scenario, the participants had the freedom to do what they wanted and to act out the situation in whatever way felt appropriate for them. In that way, the participants were able to tell the story that they wanted to tell.

# **Chapter Three: Generational Perspectives on Risk and Trust in Social Media Technologies**

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter explores the differential perceptions of risk and trust in social media that were reported and observed over the course of the interviews. It aims to answer the first question: Within the context of families living in the United Kingdom, to what extent can we detect differential perceptions of risk and trust in social media usage amongst different generations of family members?

The chapter will argue that, despite parents anticipating a large gap in perceptions towards risk and trust, their children often professed similar attitudes to theirs – if not more cautious ones. It will conclude that, within the context of these families at least, the generational gap was not as pronounced. Indeed, the true disparity of perceptions tended to be between members of the family and others within their social circles. Friends, acquaintances, and strangers, who are of similar ages nonetheless had different approaches to risk and trust on social media.

Intergenerational conflict can be seen as an aspect of family life (Steinberg, 2001; Smetana, 2008) and conflict over social media can be perceived as another form of everyday conflict (Juang, Syed and Cookston, 2012). While children can sometimes be characterised as digital natives (Rushkoff, 2011; Morozov, 2013), more at risk than other populations because of their lack of experience and their desire to embrace new technologies (HMIC, 2015b; United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, 2019), academic discourse in the last five years has focused on offering an approach to understanding social media and its role in the family (Edwards and Wajcman, 2011; Wajcman, 2016; Baym, 2017).

The family's responses to the growing demands of both being online and using social media has been multi-faceted and variable. As has been indicated, digital parenting, for example, has been conceptualised in terms of parental warmth and parental involvement, which determine the freedom given to the child online (Valcke et al., 2010a). ICTs and social media have been acknowledged as part of family life (Wajcman, 2010.) and a consequence of the increased need of

mobility (Sheller and Urry, 2006). Researchers tend to view technology in a neutral light (Baym, 2017; boyd, 2014; Morozov, 2015) despite the criticisms expressed in traditional media outlets (Griffiths, 2019; Hern, 2019). Indeed, it is because of these criticisms that it is important to differentiate between trust in the platforms themselves and trust in the users of those platforms. While social media providers like Facebook (2004) and Instagram (2010) have been criticised for their treatment of user data and experience (Adams, 2019; Siddique, 2019), trust between users and risk introduced by other users is a separate topic.

Recent research suggests that it isn't just children who use social media. Every day, different people use social media for a variety of reasons, as seen by emerging research (Ivan and Hebblethwaite, 2016; Lifshitz et al., 2016; Barbosa Neves et al, 2016; Stephen Katz, 2016). That research is also supported by statistical reports from various consumer studies, such as Ofcom's Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report (2017) and Deloitte's report on smartphone usage among adults in the UK (Deloitte, 2017). Open Data from the Office of National Statistics shows that 9 out of 10 UK households have access to the Internet, and that online shopping has grown in popularity among those over 65 years of age (ONS, 2018). What these studies show, in brief, is that while intergenerational conflict (Steinberg, 2001; Smetana, 2008) remains part of family life, the "digital divide" between different generations may be getting smaller (Helsper and Eynon, 2010).

Research acknowledges the growing penetration of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in everyday life (Edwards and Wajcman, 2011; Wajcman, 2016) as something that is imposed on individuals because of growing mobility demands (Sheller and Urry, 2006). These demands for mobility are both for physical mobility and online accessibility (Sheller and Urry, 2006) and as such lead to the erosion of the boundary between work lives and personal lives (Edwards and Wajcman, 2011; Wajcman and Rose, 2011) and the creation of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). From a theoretical standpoint, the growing individualisation of society leading to the wider reliance on technology is perceived by writers as the chief cause of risk (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004b) for the younger generations (Morozov, 2011; Juang, Syed and Cookston, 2012).

However, there are still gaps in the theory. For example, despite efforts from writers to discuss the concept of "technophilia" beyond the idea of "children being addicted to social media"

(Eglash, 2009; Martínez-Córcoles, Teichmann and Murdvee, 2017) this is still the predominant lens on practice and the way in which children's interactions with social media are viewed (HMIC, 2015b, 2015a; Griffiths, 2019; Hern, 2019). Calls to make social media safer for children following a tragedy (Bányai et al., 2017; Hern, 2019) are based on the assumption that children are "addicted" and have no agency in how they use social media (Osiceanu, 2015; Martínez-Córcoles, Teichmann and Murdvee, 2017; United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, 2019), and that modern life is reliant on technology (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004b). There are gaps in the theory as concerns to children's agency on social media, and there are gaps in the theory regarding nuanced perceptions of social media technologies by various family members. There is some theory that focuses on influencing factors on individual family members' perceptions toward risk and trust in social media technologies, but there is no theory as of yet which offers an alternative to the "children are addicted to technology" model of intergenerational perceptions of risk and trust in social media.

What this chapter will argue is that the role of the generational gap in family practices toward social media is not as significant as theory would suggest; and that it is decreasing. The chapter will use the Technology Adoption Lifetime Cycle (Moore, 1991) as an alternative theory to explain the perceived generational gap in social media technologies.

## **2. Findings**

The chapter's structure will be as follows: the first two sections of the findings will examine the contributions of both adults and children in the question and answer portion of the interview. It is important to differentiate between risk and trust in the technology (or platform) itself, and risk and trust in users of the technology, including self-confidence, as those are important distinctions for the participants. Thus, risk and trust in the technology will be the first section, followed by risk and trust in other users in the second.

The third section of the chapter will look at behaviours in the roleplaying game, described in the methodology chapter, and how the behaviours of adults contrasted with those of the children. It will take a broad view of how participants responded to various scenarios, and how the frequency of blocking versus allowing with caution versus allowing could be interpreted. The section will

compare answers and behaviours, highlighting where the perceptions of risk and trust in social media of adults and children converged, and where they diverged.

## **2.1 Perceptions of risk and trust in the social media platforms**

This section will examine how participants discussed their perceptions of risk and trust in social media platforms and other associated hardware and software necessary for their access. While all the families interviewed had multiple devices in their household that could access the Internet (smartphones, tablet and desktop computers, iPod devices with messaging functions) individual experiences of social media varied depending on the kind of access the person in question had to social media.

The first main finding regarding risk and trust in social media platforms is that, among the cohort, there was a perception of certain platforms being “for adults” and “for children.” Facebook (2004) for example was perceived as being an “adult app” by most of the younger participants, while musical.ly, YouTube, and Snapchat were seen as being for children. Those perceptions were not so much to do with the terms and conditions of the platform itself, (both YouTube and Musical.ly state that users have to be 13 or over to have an account, the same way as Facebook and Twitter) but were associated with whether the participant’s peers used it in any way. The role of peer pressure, social capital, and social isolation will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter; however, what is relevant at this point is what both adults and children seemed to think of some platforms as being more “adult” than others, with parents describing some of the rules they had put in place for their children’s social media usage, and the reluctance they felt regarding getting their children their own phones or letting them have email addresses.

This leads to the second significant finding regarding risk and trust in social media technologies, which is that for both adults and children, social media platforms were described in a way that suggests the platforms themselves are perceived as untrustworthy.

**ANGELA**<sup>2</sup> (child, 13): Um, when I think of social media, honestly, I just see a big red light going “danger, danger” like, to me, that’s not something I would wanna really be a part of. But when I think about it more, I think that it is probably quite (pause) I think that it shows how far the technological world has

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymised names used throughout.

progressed and it just... it's really interesting to be able to connect with people all over the world and um... I think for me, the only reason that I would ever get into it is because I like.... Photos, and I would like... sharing photos,

**RESEARCHER** : Mmm

**ANGELA**: But, I usually end up using things like WattsApp for that where you can just like text them to specific people instead of... [trails off]

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview.

The perception of social media platforms as useful, but also dangerous, was one that appeared in all the interviews and that both parents and children seemed to share to a different extent. Different families and different children expressed various degrees of trust in the platforms: some children were against social media and did not seem keen to use the technologies, while others embraced them. Parents seemed to accept the need for social media technologies but also stated that they would rather their children stay off for as long as possible. The decision, as described by the parents, was a difficult one, because they were concerned about what would happen once the children were “on” the platform.

However, that is not to say that the younger participants expressed excessive confidence about being on social media by themselves. In fact, some of them expressed a concern about what might “happen” to them online, and showed frustration that the social media companies themselves do not seem to be doing enough to support younger users:

**CASSIOPEA** (child, 13): Um, I don't enjoy the aspects of having um... I want to add somebody tried to follow me, and I don't like the aspect of... without... like... the... if you report something, it doesn't like you don't get a face to face conversation with somebody, you go in and, 'this is what they've done, can you... help us... to solve that,' and they just take it on, and if so many people have the same thing happening to them, then they do something about it rather than if one person has an issue with their brand of social media, they don't-, they don't take you as your own person, they take you as a group of people rather than

**RESEARCHER:** hmmm

**CASSIOPEA:** and also, I'd rather have them have like age categories, kind of like cause I don't want people... that are not my age, or over my age to follow me or to even... look at what I'm posting or anything like that, that even if it's just my profile picture, just because (pause) you don't know what people are thinking about you, especially if you... got all these like filters on you and stuff and you can definitely not look your age and so when people who are like over your age look at you, you don't know what they're thinking and that makes me so, not scared, you know, but...

- Excerpt, Rose family interview.

What this quote shows is the attitude that some of the interviewees took toward social media platforms. Many children expressed that platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) made them feel unsafe, insecure, or exposed. The cohort of younger participants (9-12 years of age) showed a dislike of too much information being gathered about a person through just their usage of social media. In one example, the Snapchat geotracking feature, was evoked as something they “did not like” about social media: the fact that, unless they were in “ghost mode”, anybody would be able to see where they were at any given time.

If the second significant finding pertains to the features of the platform, the third significant finding pertains to how they are managed. Cyberbullying was a frequently raised theme in the interviews, mentioned by both parents and children, and perhaps the most aggressive example of social exclusion that was brought up in interview. While none of the children themselves talked about being bullied themselves, they were nonetheless very concerned about the possibilities for aggression (even if their own usage of the social media technologies would have made them “compliant”). This referred once again to the risk society thesis (Beck, 1992) as the technodeterminism of the participating families – using social media to avoid social exclusion – does not insulate them from the risk of bullying.

**CHRISTOPHER** (child, 12): Erm, sometimes, yeah, sometimes it is quite bad, some things are bad that other people post, and they put, some people just ignore and it continues, and they just... and it's also another way for bullies to go on-

online and keep on bullying people, which is worse, cause you don't know who you're getting bullied by.

\*

**CASSIOPEA** (child, 12): Also I feel like, you know Snapchat people delete messages [...] After 24 hours if you don't pin that [...] And I don't think some people realize you need to screenshot messages of somebody hurting you because they can delete those messages and stuff like that, cause you can get apps that delete messages if the person has or hasn't seen it, [...] and that's not good from the point of view that if somebody was attacking you, [...] And they deleted it, and you have no proof of that?

\*

**DEBORAH** (child, 14): Yeah, so, the whole part about having to... put your information in? So, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, anything like that, and that a lot of people can reach out to you, and you really don't know who they could be, because they're hiding behind a different social profile, so...

- Excerpts, various interviews.

In response to the question about the aspects of social media they were less comfortable with, the participants brought up numerous issues. However, they tended to make distinctions between platform and users. For example, they did not like that they were expected to use them in good faith (inputting their real information, so that their friends could find them and know it is them) but there were no checks in place for stopping people using them for nefarious purposes. (Bearing in mind that identity impersonation was not exclusively used for cyberbullying.) Children were also not happy that there was no moderating put into place to protect them if there was a problem – when asked what they would need evidence for, a participant said they might need to show it to their parents, but not to a website moderator (at least not in the first instance). That same participant went on to also express their frustration that the only thing a person could do, if they were cyberbullied, was to report an account and hope that enough people did the same. They stated that they did not appreciate that an account had to be flagged multiple times in order for the

platform to take action. This is an important finding, because it shows an awareness of the systemic issues that make social media unwelcoming and unsafe.

This leads to the fourth and final significant finding of this section, that despite expressing discomfort and distrust in the social media platforms, both parents and children used them to some extent or another. In all family group interviews, there were no adults or children that eschewed social media platforms, or did not know about them to some extent. The next chapters will delve deeper into how usage of social media is shaped; but in terms of comparing parents and children, there seemed to be no strong distinctions between the two groups of participants as far as the perception of the social media platforms went. The similarities went as far as how the participants described their own practices: certain groups of adults and children stated that they did not perceive themselves at risk because their practices protected their privacy - private profiles and switching on 'ghost mode' for example.

The question then becomes, if the features of social media platforms are perceived in the similar ways by parents and children, whether the perceptions towards social media users follow a similar pattern. As this section has shown, both parents and children appeared in the interview not to trust social media platforms much, and that they were critical of both their features and their moderators. What their perceptions are of other social media users will be the topic of the next section.

## **2.2 Perceptions of risk and trust in social media users**

As seen from the previous section, neither parents nor children expressed in the interview that they were drawn to social media **platforms** in any special way. Another overarching and recurring theme was that participants in this cohort was that they shared similar concerns about social media users.

Both children and adults expressed that social media fulfilled a function for them (to get information, to socialize with existing friends) but also stated many similar reasons why they did not trust the platforms. The next table expresses, in brief, the more common complaints against social media users, and how parents and children reacted to them, as they appeared in the thematic analysis:

Aspect of social media	Parents' reaction	Children's reaction
“anyone can contact you online”	Dislike this aspect, weary of it	Dislike aspect, afraid of it (“alarm bells”, “scared”, etc)
“cyberbullying”	Dislike, against it	Dislike, against it, some had previously taken action to stop it.
“sharing everything” / “sharing too much”	Expressed concern of the practice, explained their own parental practices around it	Expressed strong dislike of the practice, both when people do it deliberately and when they do so by accident
“social media is open”	Dislike, concern	Dislike, concern, strong criticism of the providers.
“inappropriate” or “unwanted” content	Dislike of marketing, concern that the children are being exposed to sexually inappropriate or violent content, concern that children are being marketed to	Dislike to inappropriate content, expressed desire to be able to control what they see more, expressed dislike of inappropriate content being forced on them, marketing making them “moody”
“you can block people”/“you can restrict access”	Trusted the feature even if not using it themselves	Trusted the feature and used it a lot, although some children did not like that “some people get reported for no reason”
“you can talk to your friends and family”	Appreciated connectivity, although expressed concern how that changes the way	Appreciated the connectivity, perceived it as cheaper than traditional means of connecting, but

children relate to the  
world

also expressed dislike of peer  
pressure

Taken separately, the various themes (“anyone can contact you online”, “you can talk to your friends and family”, etc.) appear to reflect some of the wider social and policy discourses around social media, as seen from the literature review. They reflect the same concerns raised by policy-writers with regards to the common risks on social media. However, what is interesting is that the attitudes the children showed, as a group, did not differ from the attitudes that were expressed by their parents. This is the first significant finding of this section.

The second significant finding is that, despite having similar attitudes toward social media platforms, there was some mistrust among family members. The adult participants expressed concern about how their children would experience the online world which did not appear to reflect concerns about their own usage of social media technologies. When examining some of the themes in the answers of adult participants, one of the most common ones was a fear that their children would not be mature enough to be on social media.

This was an interesting finding, since another theme of the family group interviews was that social media had been a frequent topic of conversation in the household prior to the researcher’s involvement. The idea that social media technologies can be a source of risk and that trust is earned was not new to the young participants, as seen from the previous section. This raises the question as to where the parents’ anxiety and mistrust might be coming from, and one of the answers could be the parents’ perception of their own technological skills, as the next excerpt exemplifies:

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): ...but I hope that these guys (the children) that we can learn stuff together although they’ll be miles ahead of me [...] I hope that they’re going to...

**ALYS** (child, 9): Um, most of this stuff probably won’t apply to me,

**RESEARCHER**: Okay.

**ANGELA** (child, 13): (sarcastic) Thanks for that useful insight

**PAMELA** (to **JOSEPHINE**): You were talking like, ‘I... just...’ (exaggerating slowness)

**JOSEPHINE:** Okay, well, I just think that, I hope you guys have grown up in a way... where you'll... be able to... be a bit discerning in what you look at, and I hope that... you'll be able to pick up on things online. And you talked about that instant yesterday...

**PAMELA:** Yeah, I had a game, my dad had given me like a story game, and then they suddenly started talking about raping

**RESEARCHER:** oh

**PAMELA:** so I deleted it.

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

As the interview progressed, it became clear that Josephine was using social media more than her initial testimony suggested. The children teased her about spending too much time on Facebook, for example, and talk about how they could “read (her) mind” and that she was thinking how she wanted to be on Facebook right now. The mother did not seem pleased she spent so much time on Facebook. She did not perceive herself as technologically literate enough to provide sufficient support to her children. Nonetheless, she had enough situational experience and was engaging in the conversation with her children. For their part, her children trusted her enough to tell her about any bad or disturbing experiences they had had on social media, or on games they played, as seen from the latter part of the interview quote. Josephine’s attitude was not unique: On several occasions during the course of the research parents expressed anxiety about their children’s usage of social media, and some of them even cited this as the reason why they had agreed to take part in this research project in the first place.

The second key finding of this section is therefore that the parents did not express much trust in their children’s ability to use social media safely; however, that lack of trust did not appear to be rooted in any concrete examples the parents had about their children’s trustworthiness. Rather, the lack of trust was often connected in the interview to the parent’s perception of their own technological ability and their perceived lack of social media skills.

Another reason why the parents might have been mistrustful of their child’s usage of social media might have been their preconceptions of what children, as a group, did online. The following

excerpt, for example, illustrates a case where the parents had made up their minds about what social media meant for their child and were very vocal about what they thought about the topic and what that meant for them:

**SURAJ** (father): F-for you Chanda? What (does social media) mean to you?

**CHANDA** (child, 15): Um...

**SURAJ**: Necessity. (teasing) You can't breathe without it. (laughs)

**AKHILA** (mother): It's like oxygen, isn't it?

**RESEARCHER**: Well, it wasn't for me, when I was... younger.

**AKHILA**: Yeah, absolutely. (unintelligible) then we were not really, not-not at all relying on social media things, we were having such a good time, family time together, but yeah, these days, not having really... that much... time together (sounds amused) do we?

- Excerpt, Mehta family interview

As the conversation continued, it became clear that the child was not using social media in a great capacity to begin with, and that, as with the Marigold family, the parents were concerned for their child and that they expected the child treated social media with no critical thinking. The child (Chanda) responded in a more reticent way, admitting that they did, in fact, have mixed feelings on social media – an answer that was confirmed as the Mehta family's interview progressed – but they did not correct their parents when they expressed feelings of helplessness toward social media. In other words, a common theme running through the interviews was adults expressing some sort of concern about not being able to keep up with their children's social media usage, and the children responding with frustration, silence, or good-natured mockery and humour. The children seemed to place a lot of value in being perceived as capable and independent by their parents, and thus responded negatively to any expression of concern – even if the concern the parent showed was about the parent's own technological ability, and not that of the child.

So, within the cohort of participants, adults perceived themselves as not having much technological prowess, and therefore, did not trust themselves to be a good guide to their children.

That mistrust in oneself was sometimes perceived by the children as the adult not trusting them – as seen by how the children responded when their parents expressed low self-confidence. The third significant finding of this section is that, when looking at what behaviours adults and children perceived as trustworthy and what behaviours they saw as risky, there was not a lot of disagreement between the two generations as to what those behaviours were.

The fourth significant finding of this section was that perceptions of risk and trust in social media users seemed to be informed by stories relating to “other people”. The “other people” theme was employed as a way of showcasing what a desirable behaviour might look like, or what the participant did online to avoid what they perceived to be as undesirable behaviour. These “other people” stories had different origins: in some cases, the information came through traditional media (a news report, an chapter in the paper); in others, it came from a teacher at school; and in a third group of cases, it came as a story about “a friend of a friend”. The following two excerpts – both given as an answer to the question which aspects of social media the participants were not comfortable with - illustrate two different ways the construct played out:

**SURAJ** (father): Oh, erm, it’s more in a way for kids, w-what they’re doing on social media, so trying to educate her, tell her (Chanda) from other’s example, you know, what happened with that girl, through some, you know, news story etcetera, so that she... learns a way... that people can do, not her friends, but kids in her way, so, ensure that she’s doing the... the right thing, on social media i.e. interact with friends, you know, talk to them, and that too to a limited extent, so we always try to push her to go out, you know, rather than, sitting inside the house all day, right? It’s not easy (laughs) but whenever she proposes something, getting out with her friends physically, we just say yeah, please do. That has become a challenge... increasingly, cause we (pause) can see these days kids spend more time sitting in home, sitting inside, instead of going out, so, we don’t know how this could affect them in the future, but um... anything in excess, is not good (laughs)

Excerpt, Mehta family interview.

\*

**IOAN** (child, 11): And also um how people can interact with people they don't even know, and make friends, and apparently someone in my school didn't know someone, and this person posted pictures of themselves when they were... young, and so it looked like they were younger, and they were and adult, and they were planning to meet, and then their parents found out

**ADERYN** (mother): did that actually happen? Or was that like one of those stories people tell?

**IOAN**: Yeah, [Teacher] said someone in our school and so—

**ADERYN**: Well, [Teacher] read, I'm not sure [Teacher] would tell stories about people who are still there (laughs)

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview

As seen in the excerpts, the “other people” theme was employed both by adults and children, and to different effect. In the first one, the Suraj identified two possible sources of stories – news, and what he and his wife observed as the behaviour of other children. In the second, the child was telling a story that had been told by a teacher. The first example did not elicit a response from the child in the room. In the second, the mother pushed back against the story, trying to test its veracity and to introduce a degree of scepticism to the conversation. What both examples have in common is a parent expressing a desire for their child not to take anything - good or bad - for granted regarding social media; they also show what the parents perceive to be normal and not for social media. Suraj, for example, identified as difficult to get children to spend more time off-line than online; Aderyn, however, did not think it very plausible that someone from her child's school had been catfished.

In other words, while this project assumed that differential perceptions in risk and trust in social media technologies between two different groups of family members (adults and children) might be the biggest source of conflict and impact the usage of said technologies, what the findings so far show is that this may not be the case. The fourth significant finding of this section is that stories and hearsay shaped the participants' perceptions of each other's social media experience as much (if not more) as the things they had experienced first-hand.

So far in this section, the focus has been on the parents and how they perceived themselves regarding being able to support their children online. However, the themes from the children's interviews appear to show similar views towards the users of social media, and the same sorts of self-assessment. The children's testimonies show a degree of exasperation with their parents, but also showcase the children as independent people capable of defending themselves and their friends where need be:

**THÉRÈSE** (child, 12): I did play, on a game, and that kind of qualifies as social game, it's Roadblocks – I still do play that game – and, I joined a game with my friend, and, two other people who were on that server were saying mean things about my online friend, so I just... reported them for bullying, and I told them that, and they left, and that stopped, but I can't permanently stop them from doing that, because... I don't really know about their accounts

- Excerpt, Lys family interview

In this case, the child did perceive other social media users is dangerous, and that they made the space risky; they did not seem to think that everyone is trustworthy online. They did, in fact, seem hesitant as to whether they had done the right thing to stand up for their friend (the researcher's response was to cite some studies that show that the participant took the best possible course of action). Other children gave similar examples of having used the tools available to stand up for themselves online or to enforce a boundary: Angela, for example, blocked someone on YouTube who they perceived as creepy because the person kept leaving flattering comments on videos of them. Cassiopea reported someone for inappropriate content because they perceived the person as not being safe. The participants' testimonies showed that they viewed themselves as vulnerable, but also as exercising responsibility for their own wellbeing and that of their friends. As with their parents, therefore, the children had self-critical attitudes towards their own technological skills and ability to stay safe online.

This leads to the fifth and final main finding of this section, which is that despite slight variations in their answers, there was not a lot of difference in the themes in the answers of parents or children as groups. The perceptions of risk and trust that participants expressed as having toward users of social media (outside as well as within the family) were the same. While the ways in which the different families approached risk and trust on social media varied slightly, overall, the two

main groups of participants – adults and children – expressed the same sorts of perceptions toward risk and trust, and what aspects of social media technologies they were the least comfortable with. The next section will test out to what extent those findings apply within the context of the game.

### **2.3 Perceptions of risk and trust in the game**

The previous two sections examined whether there were differential perceptions toward risk and trust that could be detected either in social media platforms or social media users. In both cases, adults and children of the interview cohort appeared to hold similar views. While the question and answer part of the interview yielded interesting responses, it is also necessary to look at the data from the game part of the family group interview to see whether there is anything that might contradict the findings so far. Within the limitations of the method and the sample, the findings in this section do show some divergence in perception of risk and trust, with children appearing to be more cautious than their parents, and the parents being more confident than their interview testimonials would suggest.

To recap from the methodology section, the game was written with a variety of low-, medium- and high-risk scenarios in mind, drawn from popular media and literature; however, whether a participant perceived the situation as risky or not would be determined during the playing of the game. Over the course of each family group interview, the adults designated scenarios as risky about as often as the children did, although participation varied from group to group. In some families the adults preferred to pose scenarios to children than to other adults; in others the parents answered as many scenarios as the children did. There were not many cases where a parent went along with a high-risk scenario card, but a couple of times a parent did get ‘catfished’.

Figures Twelve and Thirteen illustrate how often both groups blocked, how often they allowed an interaction with caution, and how often they allowed the interaction without hesitation. While there are differences in the total number of scenarios played by children versus parents, blocking and allowing seemed to occur at similar rates, with the difference between two age groups being how often they allowed a scenario with caution. The ‘allowing with caution’ was an option employed where the participant did not perceive an immediate risk, but expressed a readiness to block if anything untoward happened. This leads to the first main finding of this section, which is that children appear to be a bit more cautious, blocking more than allowing or allowing with caution, although at a glance it is uncertain whether this is an expected deviation (given the number

of scenarios), whether this is a result of social desirability bias, or if the children were more cautious or less confident about dealing with a situation if it escalated.

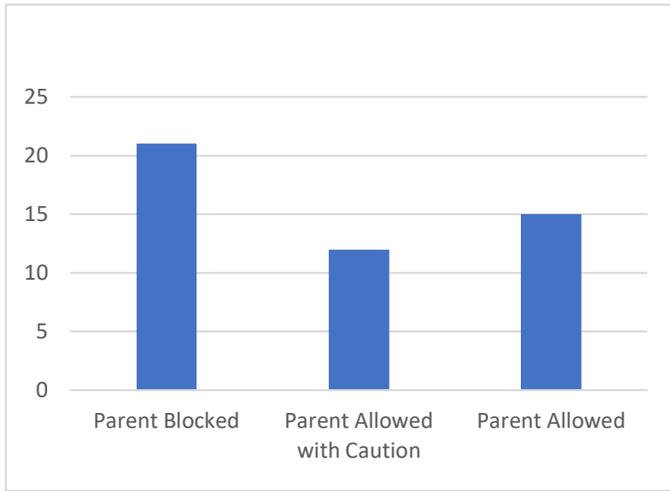


Figure 13: Adults' behaviours in the game

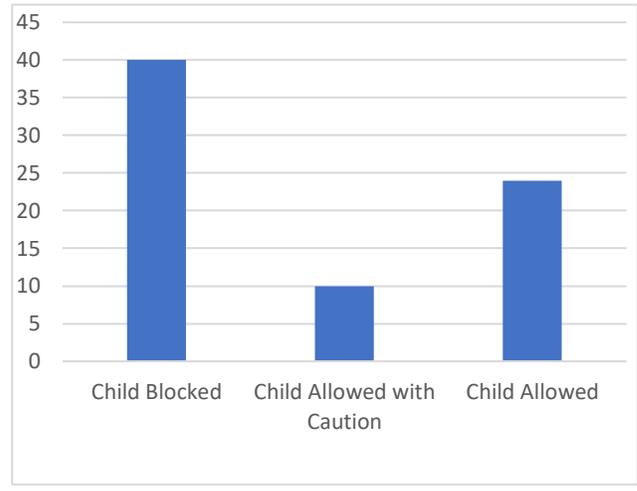


Figure 12: Children's behaviours in the game

The way both groups tended to identify risky situations was through asking identifying questions such as “Who are you?” or “How do we know each other?” or “Why are you talking to me?” For many participants, being asked loads of personal questions by a stranger without any obvious reason for it was viewed as a risk factor; as was not being able to identify a reason for the connection to begin with. Scenarios where there was some sort of connection – having met the person through a friend, or if the person was a relative, or if they played video games together and had lots of common interests – were more likely to result in the adult continuing the conversation, with the caveat that the other person did not say or do anything inappropriate. This leads to the second main finding of that section, which is that the extent to which a person knows someone online has an impact on how much their words are taken at face value.

Within the context of the game, adults tended to trust more in scenarios where they knew the person, had some sort of previous connection, or shared common interests. They were more likely to engage with old friends or relatives, even if the scenario stated that they had fallen out; the adults made efforts to preserve the relationship and blocked as a last resort. For example, in the case where an adult was presented with a case of a relative who had become multi-level-marketing representative, they didn't block the person but put them on ‘mute’ or ignored any marketing overtures. Children, for their part, appeared more willing to block as a precaution than to continue a conversation that might turn risky. Strangers with whom the child had some kind of

connection – for example, friends-of-friends, or relatives that live in another town – were more likely to be engaged with, and children would allow the interaction to the point where the other person did or said anything inappropriate.

Previous connections and obvious reasons for connecting were viewed as trust factors while the opposite – no reasons for connecting, or strangers pushing for ‘intimacy’ through personal sharing of information, were seen as risky scenarios. Previous connections will be a key point in chapter six, where an in-depth analysis of different responses to scenarios will be undertaken. Cases where the line of perception became blurred were when the participants were not able to tell whether the person they were talking to was a ‘catfish’ or not.

The Lys family interview is interesting because the children asked more questions than the adult, and gave suggestions like trying to cross-reference with friends and other connections. The children went on to give a lot of information and advice and describe what they would have done in that situation, and to describe what a satisfactory answer might look like for them. However, in other groups, adults and children asked as many questions and tried to cross-reference, so while individuals might have different approaches to establishing risk and trust, across the groups the perceptions were, on the whole, similar. This reinforces the second finding, and leads to the third one, which is that the children in the context of the game needed information and cross-referencing while their parents appeared to go more often with their “gut reaction”.

Not all information was considered useful information, however, as children tended to mistrust someone if they pushed for lots of disclosure without giving any information in turn. Having interests in common was a deciding factor, as was the background of the interaction. Previous poor experiences – like, for example, the person contacting them is a bully from school – or a lack of obvious reason for the connection were both perceived as risky scenarios, and tended to end with the child blocking the card. Even “friends of the family” or “friends of parents” did not receive an immediate approval – George, for example, thought an adult who is not a family member was suspicious for offering to help a child with their homework. This reinforces the third finding and suggests that the children’s knowledge and instincts in these groups were a lot more critical than anticipated by their parents.

The individual game scenarios will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. However, it bears noting that the areas in which adults and children’s perspectives on risk and trust online

diverged was with respect to existing connections, not strangers or school bullies. It is also interesting that, despite the parents' professed low self-confidence in using social media technologies, they seemed adept in managing risky situation and confident enough to allow (with caution) scenarios they were not 100% sure about. Whether that disparity was due to the game itself it is hard to determine. This leads to the fourth and final finding of this section, which is that, in the game, risk was associated with passivity. Trust, on the other hand, was sought – finding points of commonality (friends or other shared connections), levels of enjoyment with the interaction, whether the other person seemed credible or not.

This section has reinforced some of the findings from the previous two: that parents and children's perceptions of risk and trust are more similar than anticipated. The findings that children appear more cautious than their parents, more tuned into context cues, and were less willing to take an interaction at face value – has implications about policy and approaches to teaching children about online safety, as well as implications about the rest of this thesis.

### **3. Practical Implications**

This chapter explored the extent to which differential perceptions of risk and trust could be detected among participants from different generations. In the context of this project, those were parents and children. While some of the earlier literature surrounding risk and trust on social media might suggest that there is a distinct gap in the perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies between different generations (Ledrer, 2010, Tchudi, 2011, Patel, 2011), more recent work suggests a more nuanced approach is (Ivan and Hebblethwaite, 2016; Lifshitz et al., 2016; Barbosa Neves et al, 2016; Stephen Katz, 2016). The findings from this chapter seem to confirm to the latter body of work, in that they show very diverse attitudes toward social media technologies and interesting responses to risk and adversity. While some differences in how children and parents act on perceived risk and trust online might be apparent, both within family groups and among other groups, the parents and children displayed similar perceptions. NGO campaigns like the NSPCC's "Share Aware" cast children as clueless actors who might chat with strangers without thinking, or share pictures of their genitals as a joke, but the data gathered for this project shows that there is a lot of awareness on the children's part that not everyone talking to them on social media might wish them well.

One of the main issues that was raised, when participants were asked about the aspects of social media they were least and most comfortable with, was that a single person could do so much to curate their online space and their “audience”, before they had to navigate awkward situations or manage an uncomfortable situation. Going back to Pamela’s earlier story about playing and then deleting an age-inappropriate game, one key detail was that the “story game” was given to the child by their father (Marigold family interview). While it is reasonable to say that no parent is infallible, it does highlight that no family practice is ideal and that parents are not all perfect gatekeepers of their children’s wellbeing (Harman and Cappellini, 2015; Ribbens, 1994). It also shows that, contra what might be inferred from Beck (1992), a communal approach to risk (through the family practice of “vetting” a game for a child’s consumption) may not be enough to mitigate all risk or exposure to inappropriate content.

Something positive might be inferred from the testimonials too, however – as soon as the children (not just Pamela, but also Therese and Cassiopea) felt uncomfortable in a situation online, they reinforced their boundaries (Brown, 2015) by either deleting an inappropriate game, or blocking a source of inappropriate content, which shows that at least on the individual level, the children interviewed were willing to stand by what they believed was allowed and not allowed online. This attitude was very similar to that of their parents, as seen in the data around what participants were comfortable and not comfortable with on social media.

In a similar vein, participants also named being able to contact friends and family, and using the Internet to learn about new things, as aspects of social media they were comfortable with. Trust in social media technologies – regarding interactions with other users, rather than interactions with the platform – was focused in both cases to building relationships with an existing social circle, rather than making new friends. The only cases in these data, where a child showed more trust than their parents, was when a child talked about social media celebrities for example professional YouTubers and bloggers who made a profit from documenting their lives online. However, even in that regard, there were differences in how different children perceived Internet celebrities, and how they expressed their fandom.

This chapter has shown that there was a similarity with respect to what ideas are considered risky or trustworthy on social media. Parents and children also had similar perceptions of trust in the technology itself. It should be noted that there was no unanimity and many topics that

participants disagreed on. There were also topics that did not emerge in every interview, and there were topics where some participants refrained from commenting upon – such as for example how often they were approached by people they viewed as inappropriate, or what they meant by inappropriate content. However, none of the differences could reasonably be attributed to a generational divide. The most significant finding of this chapter is that while some differential perceptions of risk and trust can be detected between adults and children, those gaps are less significant than first anticipated and less evident than the literature suggests.

#### **4. Discussion**

This chapter offered a critique of the idea that perception of risk and trust in social media technologies is somehow connected to the generation to which an individual belongs to. Contrary to the assumptions from the start of the research project, children’s perceived risk and trust in social media was not much different from those of their parents.

This poses several questions for the theory: for example, if generation itself is not a predictor of attitudes toward social media, what is? What explains the behaviours of children toward social media, which are sometimes described as “addiction-like” by literature (Turel and Serenko, 2012; Dong and Potenza, 2014; Turel and Bechara, 2016)? How do these similar perceptions toward risk and trust in social media technologies fit with Beck’s risk society theory?

Some of the research emerging from companies such as Deloitte (2017) suggests that technological adoption is growing and will soon lead to elderly people becoming the biggest market for mobile phones and tablets. However, what the findings from this chapter suggest is not just that the Technology Adoption Lifetime Curve (Moore, 1991) is a useful model to understand how social media was adopted, it could well be the reason why digital nativism emerged as a construct in the first place, as illustrated by Figure Fourteen:

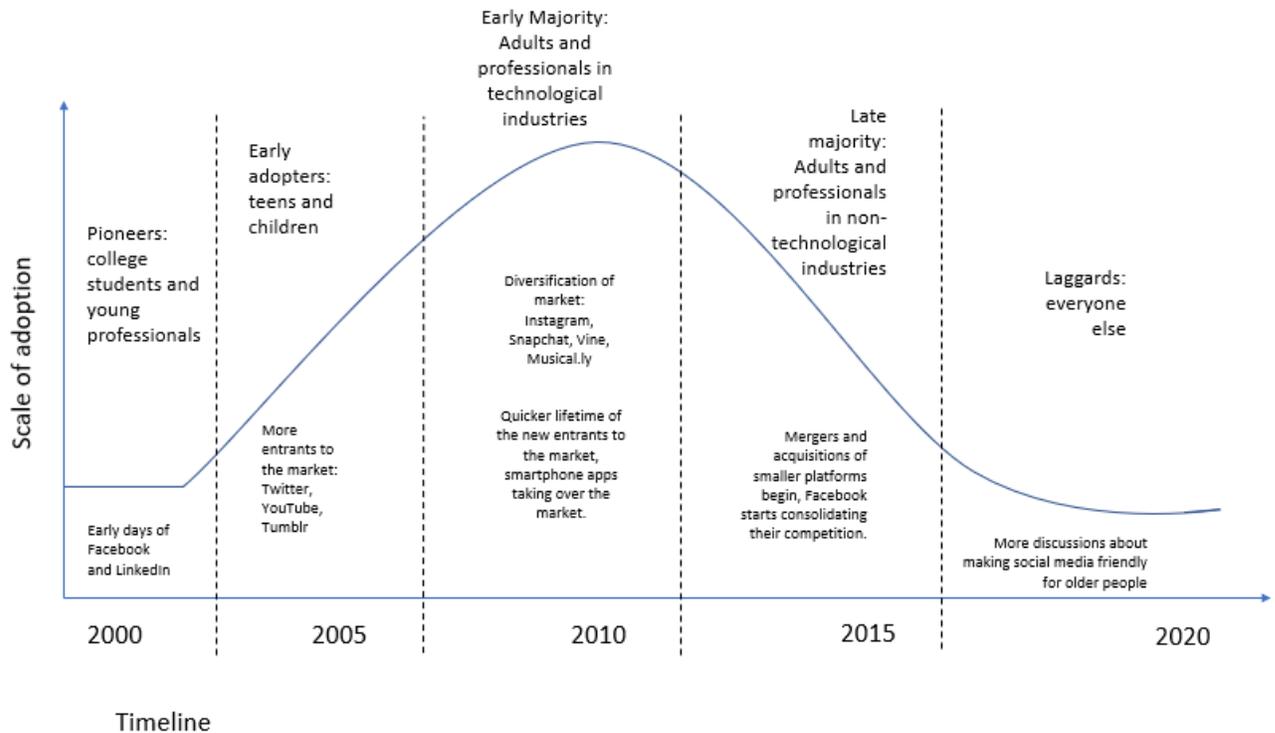


Figure 14: Adapting Moore's TALC model to adoption of social media technologies and children

By using Moore's Technology Adoption Lifetime Curve (1991) and applying it to social media, using the emergence and development of various platforms as a guidance, it is possible to discern the pattern of adoption. While the transitions between periods of adoption (early adopters to early majority for example) were likely not clearly delineated, it is possible to see how social media might have been stereotyped as a young person's interest. Early adopters, after all, are not just the people who use a new technological product or service the most – they are also the people whose experience shapes and improves the product or service for wider usage.

When the subject of digital natives is examined through the lens of market forces and the introduction of a new product, the findings of this chapter make a lot more sense. The early adopters of social media were young professionals and college students (boyd 2014), with younger children and older professionals following suit. As the 2000's and 2010's progressed, more people started using social media, creating demand for new platforms and services, such as Snapchat (2012) or Instagram (2010). These platforms and services then either grew or disappeared, lost to

a total rebrand (like Vine 2012-2017<sup>3</sup>) or absorbed into their competition (like Musical.ly, which was founded in 2014 merged with Tik Tok in 2018<sup>4</sup>). At the time of this writing, social media technologies have reached the point of widespread adoption where diversity of users can be observed, and thus it is possible to see a variety of attitudes and experiences from people of all ages on social media. With the findings of this chapter in mind, it appears that what was initially viewed as a generational difference in attitude toward new technology was more an expression of the Technology Adoption Lifetime Cycle rather than a sociological phenomenon.

Beck's risk society theory would suggest that the individualisation within the family and the predominance of social media technologies leads to the production and reproduction of risk (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004a). The findings from this chapter contradict the theory – the families interviewed displayed a lot of interpersonal cohesion and reflected critically not only on their own usage of social media technologies, but also on the platforms themselves and the actions of individual users. They expressed anxiety about whether their practices were the “right ones”, but it did not alter the family practices or appear to generate more risk. Indeed, despite their fear of doing the wrong thing for their children, most parents interviewed for this research project displayed more tolerance toward risk in social media technologies.

What this chapter has argued, above anything else, is that children's perceptions toward social media technologies do not diverge greatly from those of their parents. The findings suggest that the families interviewed had nuanced ideas and concerns about the technologies, but agreed on what they considered to be the fundamentals – that the platforms themselves could not be trusted, and that social media users had to earn trust first. But what drives people to social media in the first place? That will be discussed further in the next chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> Constine, Josh (May 4, 2018). "Vine co-founder halts development of its replacement, V2". Tech Crunch. Retrieved June 5, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Kundu, Kishalaya (2018-08-02). "Musical.ly App To Be Shut Down, Users Will Be Migrated to TikTok". Beebom. Retrieved 2019-04-30.

# **Chapter Four: Perceived Pleasure and Usefulness of Social Media Technologies**

## **1. Introduction**

The previous chapter concluded that, within the data, there was no evidence to suggest a significant generational divide in perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies. The differences that were detected were not such that could be explained by generational factors alone. Thus, the question that this chapter seeks to address, therefore is: “What are the key factors influencing social media practices within the family?” It will do so by looking at two of the most prominent themes in the data: those of perceived usefulness of social media, and the perceived pleasure derived from social media usage.

“Perceived usefulness of social media” is a concept that has been explored within literature, within the context of service design, but not exclusively. Anandraj and colleagues found that the usage of instant messaging (IM) was not only driven by work systems, but also factors such as “media richness” and “use richness” (Anandarajan et al., 2010). The perceived usefulness of social media was found to be a determining factor in its adoption in the workplace, independent of the messaging from upper management (Behringer and Sassenberg, 2015). Social media was also found to be useful in crisis management (Kaewkitipong, Chen and Ractham, 2016), although its role in revolutions and social uprisings is under question (Morozov, 2011). This focus on the usefulness in the traditional workplace is interesting because it conceptualises social media technologies as a tool for productivity, rather than a distraction. But a gap in the literature pertains to the experiences of self-employed individuals, or those working from home – something that is relevant to the interview cohort, and how parental usage of social media technologies for work influenced children’s perceptions on the usefulness of social media.

With regards to families, social media is rarely conceptualised in the corresponding literature as having usefulness to children. Deborah McBride acknowledges that social media technologies can be helpful in enhancing children’s learning and broadening their social circles, but that the use of these technologies also brings with it the risks of cyberbullying and “Facebook depression” (McBride, 2011). Indeed, a trend in literature now is to conceptualise children’s usage

of social media technologies as an “addiction” (Turel and Serenko, 2012; Dong and Potenza, 2014; Turel, 2015; Bányai et al., 2017) and a gateway to risky behaviours such as using a phone while driving (Turel and Bechara, 2016). Any usefulness, or pleasure for that matter, that is derived from social media technologies is conceptualised in literature as encouraging compulsive, “addiction-like symptoms” (Turel and Serenko, 2012). This leaves large gaps in the literature with regards to children’s perceptions of social media as a useful tool or as a tool for deriving pleasure without the implication of addiction or encouraging risky behaviours. This is another gap which this chapter will address.

Seeking to understand children’s perceptions of social media’s usefulness and pleasure separate from the discourse on “addiction” is important for several reasons. First, while some researchers find that children display “addiction-like” symptoms when using social media technologies (He et al., 2017, cited in Turel et al., 2018) it is not clear whether the findings from these studies are generalisable beyond the sample size. Second, framing social media usage in terms of “addiction” when referring to children risks alienating those with more “techno-neutral” views (Baym, 2010, 2017) from the discussion, thus increasing their risk of coming to harm on social media. Indeed, some of the ways in which children are being alienated from the discussions on social media will be explored in chapters Five and Six. Researchers have already identified that not all children and teenagers on social media are risk-seeking and that their experience of the technology is complicated (boyd, 2014) – the discourse around usefulness and pleasure therefore needs to be as nuanced as it is for adults.

Beck’s conceptualisation of “risk society” suggests that the production of risk is driven by new technologies and that any quality-creation that these technologies have cannot offset the risk they produce (Beck, 1992). This view is replicated by McBride and others, who mention the useful or pleasant aspects of social media technologies only to then list all the other ways in which the technologies harm the users (McBride, 2011; O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Turel, Brevers and Bechara, 2018). However, when the literature turns to adults, social media technologies are conceptualised in terms of productivity and knowledge sharing (Anandarajan et al., 2010; Behringer and Sassenberg, 2015) which raises the question – at which point does social media stop being useful or pleasant, and turn into addiction and risk-creation? The chapter will seek to address that gap by looking at usefulness and pleasure as a spectrum for both adults and children. It will

argue that, because of the ways in which usefulness and pleasure are blended in the family's usage of social media, the boundary between "acceptable" and "excessive" usage is harder to determine, and thus, practices that limit risk production are more difficult to enforce.

The chapter will begin by looking at perceived usefulness by parents, children, and gatekeepers. It will argue that geographical distance, professional obligations, and the importance of staying in touch play a part in how the family chooses to use social media technologies. The chapter will then move to perceived pleasure derived from social media technologies, with a focus on fandom and social-media-first entertainment as consumed by the participants. The main findings chapter will focus on the positive and negative aspects of consuming entertainment in this way, and how the participants responded to what they perceived as unethical behaviour within this entertainment sector. The chapter will then move onto the ways in which participants perceived social media as a blend of usefulness and pleasure, and the challenges that they identified with regards to establishing some boundaries around risk-production in that regard.

## **2. Perceived Usefulness of Social Media Technologies**

Most participants started their interviews by expressing their view of social media as a useful tool. A closer analysis of the theme revealed that there were two aspects to the perception of social media as useful: usefulness in overcoming the problems that occur from geographical distance between family members, and usefulness with regards to professional goals.

### **2.1 Geographical distance**

Of the eleven families interviewed, three sets of parents were first-generation migrants to the United Kingdom, with family members all over the world. In another family, the father and mother were divorced, with the father's second family living abroad. In yet another family, one of the parents was a first-generation migrant with family in their home country. For those families, social media technologies were perceived as a crucial aspect of keeping in touch with their relatives abroad, as exemplified by the following quotes:

**SURAJ** (father): Oh, (social media) is a way of connecting with near and dear ones

- Excerpt, Mehta family interview

\*

**MANON** (mother): My brother who lives in Thailand, all on Facetime, all online,

- Excerpt, Lys family interview

A core concept of Beck's risk society is the idea that, with physical communities becoming more dispersed, technological usage would increase and so would risk production (Beck and Ritter, 1992). These families' conceptualisation of social media as a tool to stay in touch with their relatives thus, in theory, increases the risks that they might encounter online; however, it also appears in line with Dekker and Engbersen's view of social media as a facilitator for global migration (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014). Although the families interviewed in the thesis did not explicitly state that social media was a deciding factor in their decisions to move, or that it is a core part of their migrant identities, they did talk about it as a way to manage the physical distance between them and their families abroad, and to maintain strong connections. The "near and dear ones" that Suraj talks about in the quote above may not enjoy physical proximity, but through social media, they can enjoy regular contact.

In some cases, contact through social media was the only way for the participants to stay in touch with distant family members – in that respect, they saw the technology as being useful enough to download and install, as seen in the following quote:

**ANGELA** (child, 13): Um, I usually trust word of mouth if anything else. I actually got Whatsapp on my phone again because my baby brother was about to be born, and I wanted photos, and I wanted to be able to share them, get photos, access Google Drive and things easily from the phone.

Um... And also it's been really helpful in helping me connect with my family, like my aunt moved to (city) so that's really helpful, so that's why I got Whatsapp

**PAMELA** (child, 11) And we've got a baby cousin...

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

In this excerpt, Angela was talking about the reservations she had about social media technologies, but that the new additions to her family, and the geographical moves of family members, made having the technology worthwhile. This adds to Dekker and Engbersen's view of social media as facilitating migration, but where they wrote from the perspective of the migrants themselves (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014), the Marigold family interview offers a glimpse of the view of the family that is left behind and how the migration of a family member resulted in the adoption of social media technologies when there was not a plan to do so.

Social media technologies are not the only way for people to connect, as adults sometimes pointed out in the interviews. Phone calls and letter-writing were often brought up as an alternative. Josephine for example, talked about how she would still write letters to their friends and family and how it was great; indeed, Marigold family had had a tradition of writing letters once a week, although that had not happened for a while:

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): We went through a period, didn't we, when we said we would spend one night a week after school where we would write a letter each (...) we should go back to doing that

**ANGELA** (child, 13): We should go back to doing that (animated)

(talking over each other)

**PAMELA** (child, 11): It costs to send letters

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): yeah, if there is anything you want, it is an expensive thing to do, but I've been writing letters to some of my (unintelligible) and it's been great.

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

This quote exemplifies several things that are relevant to the usefulness aspects of social media technologies. The first is that traditional methods of communication such as letters require time and money to produce. The second is that while the benefits of traditional methods of communication are appreciated by both child and mother, they are not a complete replacement for the "virtual co-presence" (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014) that social media technologies facilitate.

Both of these factors – cost and quality – were relevant to the families’ perceptions of the usefulness of social media technologies, and thus drove presence.

Having said that, the above was not a view exclusive to the migrant families. For example, the Rose family did not disclose having any relatives abroad, and yet they used WhatsApp (an instant messaging application, owned by Facebook) to communicate with their extended family:

**ANDROMEDA** (child, 10): We’ve also got a big family group called [name]

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

This quote shows similar considerations on the UK-family’s part as that of a migrant family, suggesting that the importance of the virtual co-presence does not change with the demographical distance of the family. Even in families that were in the same country, social media was seen as a viable way to maintain connections and consolidate weak social links (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014) – and that importance will have a crucial part to play when examining the risk that comes from insiders in Chapter Five.

The quote also shows an interesting aspect of the virtual co-presence that social media technologies facilitate, which is the ability to communicate with large groups of people. Where previously a family would have had to call individual relatives one at a time, or send several letters to different members across the country, social media allows the immediate communication with several individuals at once – thus saving time, saving money, and also saving emotional labour (Hoschild, 1979) from maintaining connections that might be classified as weak or non-existent (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014). The Roses and the Marigolds were the two families who spoke about the usefulness of the group chat functions on social media, but all the families spoke in some degree or another about social media as a bridge to geographical distance.

It is noteworthy that, while some children talked of social media as being “cheaper” than phone calls and letters, they spoke of monetary terms. The less tangible costs of using social media – the giving away of personal data, the loss of privacy (Webb, 2013; Tate, 2015) – were not raised in the interview. Whether the participants were aware of those costs was not clear to the researcher, and it would be interesting to explore in a future research project. For now, it is another example of social media being perceived as useful, and as adding value to a family separated by geographical distance.

At this point, it is worth asking at which point does a relative or a friend reside close enough for social media to no longer be useful. However, the data suggest that there is no such minimum distance, for parents or for children in the interview cohort. This would be discussed in more detail in chapter five; however, before it is possible to do that, it is necessary to look at another area in which social media technologies are perceived as useful, and that is in professional settings.

## **2.2 Professional Settings**

Within the interview cohort, there were both traditionally employed and self-employed parents who discussed the perceived usefulness of social media technologies in a work context. The sub-section will begin by looking at the self-employed people, then compare their testimonies to those who were more traditionally employed, in order to better discuss the perceived usefulness of social media technologies.

As seen from the introduction, while there is literature about the usefulness of social media in a traditional workplace, there was not, at the time of this writing, equivalent literature about the self-employed. This is interesting, because of the growth of the gig economy (Wood et al., 2019) and because social media is seen more and more as a tool for boosting productivity and encouraging information-sharing (Anandarajan et al., 2010; Behringer and Sassenberg, 2015). From the testimonials of self-employed parents, social media is seen as more of a mixed blessing than a tool for productivity:

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): The danger with Facebook is that... that I joined it for (professional group) because everyone was saying, you just missed another (event), why aren't you posting on there (...) so I'd...

**PAMELA** (child, 11): Peer pressure

**JOSEPHINE**: But, yeah, for work it's really useful because I've got work groups, lots of working groups (...) But, it's a ridiculous time-waster, and it's great when I can take a break from it, so in holidays I barely take a look at it, like, half-terms and stuff, I think it's great, I don't look at it at all.

**PAMELA** (child, 11): you do.

**JOSEPHINE**: Well I don't think about it in the holidays

**PAMELA** (mocking): Yeah, cause I've read your mind, and you're like, "oh, I miss Facebook."

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

In the above quote, Josephine talked about social media technologies being complicated for her in a professional capacity – as a self-employed person, she needed it for networking and promotion, but at the same time, she acknowledged it as a time waster, echoing some of the sentiments seen in studies on social media in structured organisations (Behringer and Sassenberg, 2015). Josephine's working from home meant that her usage of social media was less structured than that of her traditionally employed counterparts, and thus it was up to her to enforce time boundaries on her usage – as she expressed above.

What is also interesting about that quote is that Josephine's child did not perceive her mother as having great boundaries about social media for work. It was unclear in the interview if the child was teasing or if they were suggesting the adult was painting a specific picture with regards to her social media usage for work. Nonetheless, Josephine acknowledged that she did use social media a lot, and that its usefulness for work was somewhat dubious for her.

Manon, another self-employed parent who used social media for professional purposes, reported having a stricter relationship with social media technologies, using her blog for work and her Facebook for socialising, but only with family and friends. Lucinda, who uses social media for fun but also to promote her second job, echoed Josephine on social media being both useful and distracting. Part of the issue appears to be the invasiveness aspect of social media and how it is difficult to switch from work mode to social mode, and how sometimes adults are not able to help themselves with scrolling through their social media feeds for unproductive reasons:

**LUCINDA** (mother): I do keep a toehold in Twitter but I don't really look at that much anymore, I just go in and tick 'insult' (?) but I used, I was actively searching for things like Trump or, you know, now I just, I just don't go there, and actually my mood has changed **completely** and also I found out on Twitter the engagement level was just really, really low, and actually, that's the reason I, I've really stuck with Instagram because, I like, I like, unlike MALCOLM, I **like** the fact that I can actually chat with people, and that's why I do it, it's not

for follows, it's not for PR, you know getting products to promote, it's, it is actually to discuss books and writing with people, and I get a lot more of that from Instagram.

- Excerpt, Hope family interview

The above quote reflects something that will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, which is that sometimes, both usefulness and pleasure drive the use of social media technologies, and it is hard to discern one from the other. In Lucinda's case, she was on social media for professional reasons, like Josephine; she also held the view that she needed to maintain a presence for the sake of her second job as a creative writer. But she admitted to what Dong and Potenza would classify as "addiction-like symptoms" (Dong and Potenza, 2014) with regards to deliberately seeking out negative information, and then switching to another social media platform that allowed her to continue her professional activity, but in a more relaxing manner. This has interesting implications about the usefulness of social media for the self-employed, as well as for those working from home. Self-employed parents within the interview cohort seemed to struggle more with social media's usefulness for professional purposes, as the next part of this section will demonstrate.

For their part, traditionally employed parents talked about being very selective with which platforms they used for professional purposes and which ones they used for entertainment or pleasure. They talked about being careful with privacy settings (Sarah, Maria for example) and asking people they knew to be careful about who they tagged and posted (Maria) in pictures and posts. They managed their audiences and expectations by being careful of where they posted about personal things and where they posted as professionals.

Maria gave an example of LinkedIn, a platform she used for professional purposes. The platform gave her a lot of opportunities and she identified it as being very beneficial for her professional field. Nonetheless, she also testified to imposing limitations to the debates in which she engaged in. Despite LinkedIn being a professional networking platform, with a set of mores and expectations about the kind of behaviour that was allowed, Maria was nonetheless hesitant to start debates on certain topics, despite having both professional experience and scientific evidence to support her opinions (the topic she gave an example of was in the medical field). She explained

that, despite her expertise, she was also aware the arguments online could escalate and then be misinterpreted in the future, which made her reluctant to express herself.

The story shows the parent's awareness of how text and context can quickly become divorced from each other. It also shows an understanding that, from a temporal point of view, no argument is restricted to a certain time and place on the Internet. This aspect of online interactions has been discussed in literature surrounding cyberbullying and online shaming (Li, 2007, Lipton, 2011, Ronson, 2015) – but the parent in this case talked about an interaction that appeared to carry very low risk of becoming argumentative. Ronson (2015), in his overview of people who have been publicly shamed in the past, gave examples of adults who engaged in offensive or racist behaviours. The parent, on the other hand, was talking about a debate in a professional environment.

Most parents viewed social media as being useful to them professionally. An exception was Malcolm, who viewed social media as being incompatible with his professional life and resisted attempts to mix:

**MALCOLM** (father): Yeah, so... so one of my employees was like... I looked you up on Facebook.

(laughter)

**MALCOLM**: Is it, is it the one with the face? And things like that, and I said, well I don't really use it, and then she went, is **this** you, and-and I just got a drawing on mine, errr errr an I went eh, I think so, I haven't used it in a long time so, I don't really know, and-and they just can't help themselves, it's the drug of their choice sometimes. And you know

**LUCINDA** (mother): And it's nosiness sometimes, they wanna have a little look, see

**MALCOLM**: But I don't want to.

**LUCINDA**: yeah

**MALCOLM**: Can you live without that?

- Excerpt, Hope family interview

In this quote, Malcolm resisted the idea that being connected on social media had a professional use and conceptualised connecting with employees as “nosiness”. This goes against the literature that suggests social media technologies are useful for the workplace, but it makes sense if considered in the context of what purpose a certain platform is used for. In Malcolm’s case, Facebook was not used for professional purposes, and connecting with employees could therefore not be useful. Other parents, like Maria, showed similar views by separating their usage by platform and not allowing the two to mix. This is important as some of the ways in which risk can be introduced on social media is when different information streams are mixed and personal information is cross-referenced (Creese et al., 2012).

What this section has demonstrated that the parents had mixed views on social media’s usefulness in the professional setting – views that were influenced by the type of work they did and the platforms they used for each purpose. This is an interesting contrast to the previous subsection: Where families seemed more open to embracing social media technologies to bridge a geographical distance between relatives, they were more critical of social media’s usefulness for professional purposes. There was no equivalent data to compare for children – social media in an educational setting was not discussed to a great length in the interviews – which is why the next section on pleasure derived from social media is so important.

### **3. Perceived Pleasure Derived from Using Social Media Technologies**

The perceived pleasure (or enjoyment) that participants derived from using social media technologies is the focus of this section. As it was the children who reported on that aspect of their social media usage, this section will focus on them – it is of interest that adults did not often talk about social media in terms of pleasure unless it was in relation to talking with their relatives. Even when those conversations occurred, however, the adults’ descriptions tended to focus on usefulness, as seen from the previous section. They also raised the notion of “materialism” often (Rose and Gordon family interview), which will also be one of the talking points of this section.

The analysis revealed three main ways in which participants connected pleasure (or the lack thereof) with social media technologies as they were talking in their respective interviews. The first is the virtual co-presence it allowed with friends and family. The second is social media-first entertainment and the fandom connected to that entertainment. The third and final aspect is connected to desired objects (phones, iPods) and the role of advertising in creating feelings of desire and fear of missing out.

### **3.1 Virtual co-presence**

As seen from the previous section, virtual co-presence was important for families to stay in touch, and participants viewed social media technologies as a more effective, media-rich medium for connecting with relatives. However, geographic distance was not the sole reason cited for why the participants used social media technologies. For many, social media was a way to spend fun time with friends in a virtual environment. In every interview, the participants – both adults and children – stated that an aspect of social media they enjoyed was being able to talk to friends online, but in some interviews, they elaborated further, talking about organising virtual hang-outs and game-play:

**THÉRÈSE** (child, 11): For... closer utilisation of Skype, I actually, I'm planning to trying to play games, board games with my friend through Skype, so maybe one of us would have the board and the other one would... move the things for the other one, so for example, we were... we could play Connect Four through Skype, so she'd be at her house with the game and I would just be telling her where I'd like to put my colour.

**RESEARCHER:** So what um, I mean, I'm trying to imagine, is it like, does she live very far away then?

**THÉRÈSE:** **Quite**, about an hour away? So if we want to play games that could be a solution.

- Excerpt, Lys family interview

This quote is interesting for several reasons. First, it gives more context to the concept of geographic distance as a driver for social media usage. In this case, the friend did not live in another

country, but they were still far enough for the child to see social media as an acceptable alternative. Second, it shows that the sorts of games that children might play on social media vary in type and complexity.

Literature tends to portray children's usage of computer-assisted games in terms of "addiction" (Turel and Serenko, 2012). Manon's testimony runs against the narrative of the technophilic youth (Osiceanu, 2015) that is drawn into video-game addiction as a matter of course (Dong and Potenza, 2014). It's part of a clutch of testimonials that talk about the usage of social media to satisfy a desire for time with friends.

The participants' use of social media technologies for facilitating friendships varied in terms of the activities themselves. Some played games (analogue and computer-assisted both), some commented on each others' photos or posts, some just consumed the same social media content to discuss the next time they met face to face. Age did not seem to play a part in how the child used social media technology. Indeed, what that seemed to influence how the child derived enjoyment from social media was the child's own temperament. For example:

- Ioan (11 years), Angela (13 years) and Ratna (15 years), for example, expressed low perceived enjoyment and low perceived usage of social media, despite living in different areas and having different interests.
- A lot of the younger participants (Cressida, 5 years, Gwallter, 5 years, as well as Chanda's younger sibling, who did not participate in the interview but whose parents mentioned them a lot) derived a lot of enjoyment from consuming social media content, despite their activities being controlled by the parents.
- Other young participants (Joao, Robin, Christopher, all 10 years old, and George, 12 years old) described consuming a lot of specific social media content, but without having their own individual accounts or posting about it.
- Older siblings (Michael, Jane, 14 years, Hanako, 13 years, and Joe, 14 years) talked about having their own profiles and enjoying engaging with their friends, while others (Cassiopea, 12 years) were on social media just to be kept in the loop.

None of the children interviewed for this research project displayed or reported "addiction-like behaviours" (Dong and Potenza, 2014; Turel, Brevers and Bechara, 2018) toward social media

technologies. While some parents (like Suraj) teased their children about being “addicted to” and not being able to “live without” social media, the children themselves did not conceptualise social media technologies as being vital to their lives. They did, however, express varying levels of enjoyment of it, which is important because it brings a level of nuance to the discussion of pleasure derived from social media. The children explained more than adults why they liked or disliked particular aspects of social media, and they supported their opinions with their individual perceptions and previous experiences with social media, echoing boyd’s findings that personal experience played a key role in how social media was experienced by children (boyd, 2014). The findings from this project show the children and their friends as discerning consumers of social media technologies, using it for their own group goals. This in turn has implications about risk and the levels of risk allowed.

When children discussed less pleasant aspects of social media, it was in relation to “likes” and “follows” – in other words, how popularity was quantified and measured in their respective social groups. This was a theme that emerged in several different interviews, with Pamela, Andromeda, and Ioan all giving examples and describing their friends’ behaviours on social media as “stupid”. Andromeda, for instance, talked about how a friend of theirs got excited whenever they got a new follower, and that, “if you know the person, they brag about it (whispers) so much” (Andromeda, child, 11). What they meant by that was that their friends’ focus on follower counts on social media made the child enjoy their own experience less.

Children’s obsession with the size of their social media following was not a phenomenon that was expected given the literature, but it makes sense when considered in conjunction with the other themes extrapolated upon in chapter five, such as peer pressure and a fear of social isolation. The following quote from Ioan and Gwen exemplifies this further:

**GWEN:** You’ve got like five followers and--

**IOAN:** No but that’s because, (noise) that’s because all your followers are your friends and none of my friends have

**GWEN** (teasing): You don’t have any friends! (laughter)

**ADERYN** (mother): (laughter) You-you led yourself into that one!

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview.

This exchange raises the question of whether some children perceive their social media following as being reflective of their face-to-face social networks and popularity. In this case, Gwen teased her brother about “not having any friends”, although – as it emerged during the interview – Ioan’s friends were not on social media as much, and their interactions were not restricted to virtual space. Gwen did not seem aware of the commercial aspects of social media, and thought of it in terms of developing and flaunting her social capital – something which she also appeared to take pleasure in.

**GWEN:** [...] lots of my friends have the social media apps, and, like, I guess, no it’s not that a lot happens, but then you can see what your... friends are doing, and like, it’s just a lot easier to connect and interact with your friends when you’re on holiday, you can see what they’re doing, and like I think you can pretty much say, half of my school, of year eight, not all of them but pretty much everyone social media sites, like a lot of people would have Instagram, and then a few last people have Snapchat, and then, pretty much everyone has Whatsapp, and then... Youtube, well, I think **everyone** uses YouTube, adults, kids

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview.

Gwen conceptualised social media co-presence as being no different than socialising with friends in a face-to-face setting. For her, the enjoyment that was derived from using social media technologies was an extension of the enjoyment derived from popularity and being connected to others. There is an element of peer pressure to the testimony, but it is more about the need to be on multiple social media platforms (or apps, as she calls them) than whether the participant should have been on them in the first place. Gwen represents the far end of the spectrum with regards to enjoyment derived from social media technologies, as far as the cohort goes – at least as far as social purposes go. The next section will examine social media as a source of entertainment, and the pleasure derived from fandom.

### **3.2 Fandom**

As seen from the typology of the participants’ usage of social media technologies from page 107, some children used social media for virtual co-presence with friends, but all of them used

social media to consume entertainment. For younger children, that meant watching pre-recorded videos or excerpts from TV shows – something which has been covered by the literature. For older children, their consumption of entertainment also included content from social media-first sources, like YouTube celebrities.

The topic of social media celebrity has started to gather more academic interest in the context of influencer marketing (Woods, 2016; Stubb, Nyström and Colliander, 2019). It differs from traditional celebrity culture because it is a lot more immediate and a lot more personal. The YouTube content creators which participants talked about in the interview fell into the category of the “relatable” star – someone who makes videos from their bedroom and talks to the camera as if they are talking to a friend. In one of the interviews, Josephine and Angela got into a discussion about a particular family that the latter was following – how the mother was confused about the appeal of the channel, and why her daughter might feel invested in the influencer; meanwhile, the daughter felt the need to explain that she was not that invested, but enjoyed consuming the content because they were inspiring people.

**ANGELA** (child): I spend a lot of time like making sure that the people I follow online are really nice people(...) it's nice to see um, you know, how different they live to where we live, and the way they live is similar to the way we live (...) these are people who I feel like are good people (...) You know, if anyone I knew or anyone I didn't know said 'oh I'm having a baby' I would say 'oh, congratulations' and I would feel really good; and I think because I had grown to familiarise myself with these people and like... I wanted to make sure they were okay, and that, their baby, their twins, I wanted to make sure that their babies are gonna... come out okay (...) that's just why I did it, and like I know some people get really obsessed with youtubers and say ohmygosh you saved my life, I love you, you're great and, but I would never say I love you, I think that's way too weird, because a relationship has got to be two-sided (...) But I think that er, you know I don't have any form of relationship with them, I just... I just think that they're inspiring people, just like there's some.... Just like following celebrities on Instagram, or... going to a concert for a musician, or

something like that, it's just kind of... wanting to support someone. (quietly)  
And it's good to connect.

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview.

Several important things are going on in this passage, and it is interesting because it is one of the few times a child had gotten defensive in an interview. While for the most part parents tended to let their children speak, on this occasion, mother and daughter were arguing about whether it was okay or not to get invested in a celebrity's pregnancy. The argument seemed to have been a recurring one, with the mother reacting with concern whenever her child's fandom seemed to exceed what she thought was acceptable; meanwhile, the child was arguing that their fandom was within bounds.

What is interesting in the passage is that Angela was making a distinction between different types of fandom: the critical fan, who was aware the social media celebrities were staging and playacting to a degree; and the non-critical one who accepted things as a given. From the parent's perspective, there was no difference between the two; for the child, it made all the difference to her experiences on social media. Angela perceived herself as being more discerning than other fans in how she chose to consume content on social media; she explained her thought process as to how she vetted channels for herself, and selected creators that she wanted to support. She saw herself, in other words, as a more sophisticated, critical viewer, and thus felt comfortable supporting content creators and feeling excited for them during an important life event, such as having a baby. To Angela, an essential condition for her enjoyment from consuming social media content was this perception of herself as being a critical viewer.

For the parents in this cohort, the proximity between viewer and content creator on social media was perceived as a risk, as evidenced by Josephine, as well as Lucinda and Malcolm, Marissa and Paul, Aderyn and Liam, and other parents who expressed discomfort with how much social media their children consumed. It was not clear whether that discomfort was connected to social media celebrity or not, but it did appear to be a significant topic of conversation for the families.

With regards to managing the risk from fandom and celebrity culture, the children did not specify any strategies except perhaps for relying on the social media's own verification system:

**GWEN:** Oh, and you have officials on Instagram

**IOAN:** What are officials?

**GWEN:** Basically, you know how some people can pretend to be, for example, [celebrity name] and all of them would pretend to be [celebrity name] so basically the official people have a blue tick, and you can only, and I don't know how you can get a blue tick, but that basically means you're famous and that you're special.

**ADERYN:** Oh

**IOAN:** (joking) I'm \*special\*!

**ADERYN (mother):** You \*are\* special, outside you've got a blue tick,

(talking over each other)

**GWEN:** NO-ONE from my school has a blue tick.

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview

This reliance on the social media platform's own verification system is interesting when taken together with the criticisms that families levied at other features of the platforms (as seen from chapter three, section 2.2). It may well be that with regards to celebrities the verification system is sufficient – as seen from the quote above, the children and parents were aware of the fact that official verification has limitations attached to it, and is not appropriate for every type of user.

Where children were critical of social media stars and their own fandom was with regards to materialism and desired objects, which is what the next subsection will focus on.

### **3.3 Desired objects and “materialism”**

So far, this section has focused on the positive feelings that social media evoked for participants; the pleasure derived from the virtual co-presence with their friends, the enjoyment from consuming social media-first entertainment. What has not yet been explored is the ways in which materialism impacts the participants and how they perceive advertisers on social media relative to other users of the platform.

Materialism as a concept was not one that was anticipated during the initial fieldwork, but nonetheless it was one raised by participants as time went on, as seen by the following quotes:

**PAUL** (father): about that last question, one thing that we, probably not the best way of putting it, but I don't kind of like the sort of materialistic elements of social media (...) You know, the kind of pressure you feel looking on Face where everyone's having an amazing holiday somewhere or everyone is having a fantastic experience and whatever, and all the sort of things; I don't know whether it **counts** .... Strictly social media, but they kind of follow.... YouTubers and other kinds of people who are on the Internet who are, you know.... They're obviously quite impressionable and a lot of it

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

**ADERYN** (mother): Yeah, that's another kind of like, fighting against it a bit, I mean really that whole sort of... pressure, I think that's just the sort of thing that puts pressure on you to be a certain way, that sort of stuff really.

**LIAM** (father): and the competition is really, sometimes I guess it can really feel like a **competition**, in terms of, I'm the greatest, look at what I've done, blah blah blah, and so, I'm not.

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview

In those quotes, the participants ascribe multiple meanings to “materialism”. Among those meanings is “consumerism” – aka “the life common to the relatively rich societies which promotes the continual purchase of consumer goods as beneficial to both the economy and personal fulfilment” (Giddens and Sutton, 2017:74). Another of those meanings is “status” and the signalling of that status – aka “people’s standing in society, based on the esteem or prestige in which individuals or groups are held by other members of society” (Giddens and Sutton, 2017:113). And while the participants did not state it, the reason they appeared to ascribe negative meanings to what they call “materialism” is how it is related to the concept of “power” – more specifically, the way “capitalists exercise power over workers by shaping their desires through the media” (Giddens and Sutton, 2017: 210). What “materialism” means to the participants, therefore,

is a combination of consumerism, status signalling, and power imbalance; indeed, it means “status signalling through advertiser-driven consumerism”. Those terms will be used in this section to give more clarity to the data.

In both cases cited above, the parents were the ones to raise the topic of materialism and how social media created what they perceived as competition between friends. This is an interesting finding because it shows the limitations of what pleasure can be derived from social media by the participants and also it shows their awareness of what is problematic and what is not. It is interesting that, of all the risks that have been cited from the literature around social media and risk (McBride, 2011) it was competition and “materialism” (status signalling through consumerism) that participants focused on.

The conversation about social media and materialism appeared to be a recurring one for at least one of the families. Following their father’s statement about social media, both Andromeda and Cassiopea started talking about professional social media personalities and how it was wrong that they made so much money from social media. In the children’s words, “you’ve got to work hard to earn money” (Andromeda) and that it was not right for people to receive remuneration for sharing their lives, that it made them “entitled” (Cassiopea).

Several interesting sub-themes were noted in that part of the interview. For one, Andromeda and Cassiopea made no distinction between people who used social media casually, and people who leveraged the algorithms and the monetisation systems and ad revenue in their favour. Thus, they made no distinction between someone who used social media recreationally, and someone who used social media professionally. Despite the lack of distinction, however, Cassiopea was aware that social media made her want more expensive things for her birthday or for Christmas, which had an effect on the people who bought her presents.

**CASSIOPEA:** [...] also you see all these people walking around in designer everything, and I know I do this like now I’ve started to like more expensive things, and that has a knock-on-effect to anybody at my birthday or Christmas or stuff like that because of the things that I want (pause) You know what I mean?

**RESEARCHER:** Yeah, absolutely

**CASSIOPEA:** It broadens your... like way of thinking that... everybody’s got this and

**ANDROMEDA:** And I need to have it

**CASSIOPEA:** I need to have this because this person's got it, and it kind of makes you more moody because obviously then you can act a certain way, and that's alright because they don't get reported on it (the YouTubers) and they make a lot of money out of that, and is that going to make me a lot of money out of that? No.

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

As seen in the quote, the children were aware of the relationship between the advertiser content and their own satisfaction with life, in that being shown that content made them more unhappy. The most telling, however, was Cassiopea's observation that by receiving a lot of money for not doing any hard work made a person feel entitled and "moody" – a sign, perhaps, of previous conversations she had had with her parents, but also an indication of a deeper understanding of internal and external validation, and the role that effort and graft had in boosting one's own satisfaction in life:

**CASSIOPEA:** And just getting a camera and filming your daily life and then clicking upload to a social media and so that makes you billions of pounds is not really the... right way to do that, because [...] you feel entitled to do that then, because that gives you more... money.

- Excerpt, Rose family interview.

Whether or not "getting a camera and filming your daily life and then clicking upload" is the full extent of a professional YouTuber's life is not relevant in this case. What is relevant is how the participant conceptualised hard work, appropriate compensation, and whether or not certain behaviours get rewarded more than others. For example, the "moodiness" she referred to could have been a feeling she had experienced herself, when comparing herself to others on social media, but it could have also referred to behaviours she had observed in others – friends, YouTubers, etc. – when they felt like they were not getting their dues. Either way, that quote is telling because of how it encapsulates the impact that advertising on social media had on the participants, in that it increased their dissatisfaction in life and created disaccord.

For an example of how the disaccord might have played out, there were several instances during the interviews where the participants talked about the kinds of devices they had and their dissatisfactions with them. Alys, for example, stated that she had three phones, none of which worked as she liked. Jane had her own iPad because the school had asked all the parents to purchase them. And Gwen used the interview to ask if her parents would get her a new Samsung phone “with the fingerprint (unlocking function)”.

**GWEN: BASICALLY** everyone wants an Apple product, and I can message them on an Apple product, and if you don’t have an Apple product I have to use a different method of messaging like my phone accounts, email,

[...]

**ADERYN:** Well, you see, LIAM has a Samsung and he thinks it’s great, I have an Apple phone, GWEN has my old Apple phone

**GWEN: Mom,**

**ADERYN:** Ioan has an iPod

**GWEN:** can I get a Samsung with a fingerprint?

**ADERYN:** You’re not getting a new phone

**GWEN:** it’s a **Samsung**, it’s just

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview

In this example, the “asking for a new phone” could have been done in jest, in line with some of the other interactions in the family; nonetheless, it is interesting that the children had a high awareness, not just about the kind of platforms they could access social media on, but also about the kinds of devices they could use and the features the devices had. This focus on the type of product relates to the concepts of materialism and power, and how pleasure related to status signalling in the child’s social group. For the children interviewed, having the latest gadgets signalled their status in their friend group, and thus that served to increase the pleasure of having the device.

In families with siblings, the question of who got what device, how soon did they receive a personal phone or a tablet, and what kind they received, was a matter of some excitement. In families with single children, or families where there was a large age gap between the children (5 years or more) the participants interviewed seemed a lot more relaxed about having their own devices or having better devices than their siblings.

This brings the discussion back to the subject of perceived pleasure derived from using social media technologies, and the role that advertising impact and self-promotion had on the participants. Despite their enjoyment in sharing virtual co-presence with their friends and family, and the pleasure they derived from consuming social media content, there was a sense in some of the interviews that the advertising impact was a price they had to pay. While materialism on social media did not put off the participants from engaging in it, it did appear to diminish somewhat their enjoyment.

Moreover, out of all the potential risks of social media, the impact of materialism was the one that participants identified the most in interviews. While questions of stranger danger and cyberbullying were raised as the interviews went on, it was advertiser impact that was the easiest to articulate. This is interesting and could give some indication of the interactions within the family that occurred before the interview with regards to social media.

What this section as a whole has demonstrated is that social media for the interview cohort was not just a useful means for keeping in touch – it was a way to derive pleasure, a source of enjoyment, and a way to enhance social connections through virtual co-presence. In many ways, it confirms what some of the literature around migration and geographic dispersal has already said about social media (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014) as well as the literature around time and virtual co-presence (Wajcman, 2010.) which the participants both connected with pleasure they perceived to get from social media. However, the findings also add more to the literature by highlighting the ways in which children derive pleasure without exhibiting “addiction-like symptoms” (Dong and Potenza, 2014).

Indeed, the findings showcase children as more discerning and critical consumers of social media. Whether it was for enhancing a connection with their friends, or through consuming social

media-first entertainment, the participants showcased an awareness of the monetary aspects of social media and a weariness of the risks associated with it. The next section will bring these findings together with those from the section on usefulness and talk about the ways in which usefulness and pleasure provide a blended drive to participate in social media.

#### **4. Discussion**

This chapter examined two of the factors that have emerged from the analysis of the data as driving forces behind the family's usage of social media technologies: perceived usefulness and perceived pleasure. The factors are not the only ones that have had an impact on the family's practices around social media technologies, but they have emerged as relevant and important within the context of this thesis.

While the chapter has examined perceived usefulness separate from perceived pleasure, the two factors were very much intertwined in the interviews. While some participants drew a line between their usage of social media for fun and their usage of social media for work, others were a lot more fluid in their usage and their interpersonal boundaries online. Indeed, even if an individual used one social media platform for one purpose (professional advancement, talking to friends and family) they also had a toehold in another platform for a different purpose. In that regard, the participants' usage of social media technologies echoed Bauman's thesis on the "liquid modernity" and how individuals are changing and reinventing themselves (Bauman, 1999).

While the perceived usefulness and perceived pleasure in social media varied from person to person, it was possible to come up with a framework for classifying the different participants as either belonging in or hovering between one of four extremes on the spectrum of usefulness and enjoyment. Figure Fifteen illustrates that spectrum:

<p><b>High Enjoyment, Low Usefulness</b></p> <p>Participants who reported using social media for wasting time and having fun. Participant did not enjoy social media but participated in discussions with friends. Frequently tagged in discussions but replied rarely. Usage linked with socialisation in the data.</p>	<p><b>High Enjoyment, High Usefulness</b></p> <p>Participants who reported finding social media useful and <u>fun</u>, and spent a lot of time without reservation online. Participant enjoyed social media and engages with friends, posts content, and starts conversations. Usage linked with socialisation in the data.</p>
<p><b>Low Enjoyment, Low Usefulness</b></p> <p>Participants found social media neither useful nor fun and spent the minimum amount of time necessary online. Usage conceptualised as necessary in the data.</p>	<p><b>Low Enjoyment, High Usefulness</b></p> <p>Participants did not enjoy social media but found it more useful and practical than other means of communication. Very little engagement with other social media users. Usage conceptualised as necessary in the data.</p>

*Figure 15: Usefulness and pleasure as drivers for participant usage of social media technologies*

While the ideas demonstrated in Figure Fifteen are the four main extremes in the perceived usefulness and enjoyment in social media technologies, where participants fell on this spectrum varied. With some participants, where they fell on the spectrum could change depending on the platform in question. With others, they were between extremes, or in some cases – in the middle of all four. What this finding highlights is the need for theory to embrace fluidity, in the ways in which categories are made and assigned. It also shows that perceived usefulness and perceived pleasure are not only two factors that drove the family’s usage of social media technologies, they are connected, and they are often overlooked.

Despite the literature that suggests older generations might be technophobic as a rule of thumb (Ledrer, 2010, Tchudi, 2011, Patel, 2011) the adult participants interviewed in this project expressed a more nuanced view of social media. While they expressed concern and reservations regarding how their children used it and how ubiquitous the technology has become in daily life, the excerpts in the chapter suggest a pragmatic view of social media, as a useful tool. They acknowledged the complexity of their own relationships with technology and that, while they did

not trust social media completely, they thought it was necessary to maintain familial relationships and support professional advancement. That more pragmatic view is more in line with recent writings reasons (Ivan and Hebblethwaite, 2016; Lifshitz et al., 2016; Barbosa Neves et al, 2016; Stephen Katz, 2016) that explore the complex relationships that adults forge with social media – not just for the sake of understanding their children better, (McBride, 2011) but for the benefit of adults as well.

For children, too, the spectrum for perceived usefulness and pleasure from social media technologies is an important addition to the discussion. While it is crucial to understand why some children might display addiction-like symptoms when using social media, (Dong and Potenza, 2014; Turel, 2015; Turel and Bechara, 2016) it is necessary not to lose sight of those who do not use social media in this way. In terms of practice and policy, leaving space for the casual usage of social media by children allows more room to parents and educational professionals to be able to talk about risk and trust, and at what point social media no longer becomes fun or useful.

The sections on social media-first entertainment, advertiser impact, and materialism is a good example of the latter. While there is a risk associated with the ways in which the bridge between celebrities and fans is narrowing in everyday life, that is not what is being discussed in the families. The materialistic aspects of social media and how it encourages comparisons between friends are topics that families feel that they can address, but not so much the finer points of social media celebrity and what it means to admire as friends people who are meant to just be entertainers.

The need for a more nuanced discussion about risk and trust on social media technologies will also become apparent in the discussion on friends, trusted adults, and risk from inside the social circle. While this chapter has focused on the perceived benefits the participants drew from virtual co-presence with friends, the next will look closer at the dynamics of those interactions. It will examine the social drivers to be on social media, and the ways in which threats can make their way inside the social circle, to see if Beck's ideas on communities mitigating risk are relevant in the modern context.

## **Chapter 5: Friends, trusted adults, and insider threats**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter further examines the question “What are the key factors influencing social media practices within the family?” with a focus on “communities” and the ways in which a community may introduce risk. It will build on the findings on the previous chapter – the role virtual co-presence with friends and family has in driving usage of social media technologies. It will examine how perceived peer pressure got participants involved in social media in the first place, and how it keeps them involved despite their concerns about online risks. This chapter focuses on two specific threats – the ones introduced by friends, and the ones introduced by authority figures. The combined impacts of those three factors – peer pressure, threats introduced by friends, and threats from authority figures – will be discussed in the conclusions.

This chapter will use Ulrich Beck’s risk society theory - that risk production is driven by the twin forces of increasing individualisation and technological determinism (Beck and Ritter, 1992). This theory – as discussed in the literature review – was seen as pertinent as it implies that a restoration of communities and a strengthening of social ties should result in a reduction of risk (Laing, 2016). However, the chapter will also demonstrate some of the limitations of risk society as a theoretical lens – as a macro theory, it will fall short of providing a theoretical rationale about how “communities” reduce risk.

To recap, the definition of community being used in this chapter is “a group of people living in a particular locality or who have a certain shared interest, who engage in systematic interactions with one another” (Giddens and Sutton, 2017:117). This includes the family, but it also includes friendship groups, colleagues, and schoolmates. With regards to social media’s usage in combatting geographical distance (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014) it stands to reason that a stronger community of friends and family can help an individual combat the risks of social media technologies.

What risk society and its supporting literature does not address is what occurs when risks are introduced by the community itself. On a macro level, Beck’s thesis makes sense as communities have more combined power to combat risk (Beck and Ritter, 1992); on an individual level, however, a fear of loneliness can sometimes drive a person to risk-taking behaviours (Laing, 2016).

For this reason, it is necessary to look at the context of the families interviewed and whether their communities do indeed combat risk, or if they drive risky behaviours. This is relevant when looking at peer pressure and the role it plays for children.

The role of community in risk management is explored the most in discussions on cyberbullying. In literature, bystanders and other community members are shown to have the most power to help (Li, 2007; Gini et al., 2008; Catanzaro, 2011) but what the literature does not cover so much is when the bystanders closest to a victim are friends. Some of the literature covers instances of bullying and cyberbullying from friends, but not to a great extent – and it does not cover instances when a risky individual is introduced in a friend group by another friend. This is a gap that this chapter will seek to address, by looking at some of the vignettes in the game and how the participants responded to risk scenarios that came from friends-of-friends.

Another gap in the literature that this chapter will seek to address is what happens when risk comes not from a stranger, but a trusted adult (like a family member) or an authority figure (like a teacher). The concept of “stranger danger” as being the predominant risk for children online has been challenged somewhat (boyd, 2014) but only to a certain extent, without getting too much into the specificities. The role of “authority figures” in children’s usage of social media has been explored in the context of organisations, employment and disaster management (Auger, 2013; Miller and Melton, 2015; Busa et al., 2016). However, a gap in the literature opens when examining the concept of “insider threat”. What happens when risk is introduced by an “authority figure” or a “trusted adult” in the context of a family’s usage of social media? Given the ease at which criminals and sexual offenders might travel across borders, and the difficulty law enforcement and offender management personnel might find in sharing information about their activities (Hilder and Kemshall, 2016) this places all the more importance on a community’s ability to discern risk when it is introduced from an authority figure. This chapter addresses some of those gaps in the literature by looking at some of the game scenarios and the responses of research participants to risk when it was introduced by trusted individuals.

The chapter will start with an examination of how peer pressure might lead a child going on social media before they are comfortable, and how peer pressure might result in a parent staying on social media despite where they fall on the usefulness/enjoyment spectrum from the previous chapter. The next section will examine the risks introduced by friends and how in some cases the

family's advice does not help the child manage that risk. The final section will move onto risk introduced by authority figures – teachers, other parents – and the gaps in the risk discourse around the role of authority on risk-management behaviour.

## **2. Peer pressure to be on social media**

The dictionary definition of peer pressure is “a feeling that one must do the same things as other people of one's age and social group in order to be liked or respected by them” (Merriam-Webster, online source.) While the participants themselves did not bring up instances where their friends made them behave in a certain way, both adults and children gave examples where the collective behaviours of their social group put a choice to them about whether to use social media or not. This is relevant because the literature does not link social media usage with peer pressure – the implication is that the transition is wanted by all members of that community. However, the data from this research project imply otherwise. For example:

**LIAM** (father): C-can be tricky, because some people invite you to a party on Facebook, and I would occasionally look at Facebook but not regularly, and so I've very often missed...

**ADERYN** (mother): Missed out

**LIAM**: on an invite, because it's come, that's, unless everyone's on it, you can be excluded...

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview

When looking at the usefulness/pleasure spectrum framework from the last chapter, LIAM fell somewhere between low usefulness, low enjoyment, and high usefulness, low enjoyment in his interview contributions. His use of social media technologies, as reported, was motivated more by usefulness than pleasure, and the role of his friends in his choice – as seen from the quote above – was to keep him on social media despite his personal feelings about it.

This is interesting because peer pressure tends to be seen as a youth phenomenon in literature (Harakeh and Vollebergh, 2012; Black, Devereux and Salvanes, 2013; Iwamoto and Smiler, 2013), not so much something that adults might feel. Indeed, advice for parents on social media technologies is often for them to serve as a moderating force for their children's usage of social media technologies (NSPCC, 2015). What the above quote suggests is that, despite the father not saying outright that he felt pressured into using social media, he perceived himself as being at risk of exclusion, if he did not engage with his community on Facebook.

Indeed, adults can feel peer pressure on behalf of their children as much as they can do so from their own friend group, as seen from the next quote:

**PAUL** (father): Well that's quite interesting because I've found a little bit with Cassiopea starting secondary school this year, so she got um, a mobile phone, this year, I sort of set her up with you know a gmail account and that sort of stuff, and really you're not meant to be like looking at the small print, you're not meant to have some of this stuff referred to you, and I kind of... felt like as a parent, not pressured into but kind of all her friends were going to be using social media and I sort of stopped her from using it at that age where she would become like excluded from stuff that was going on lately, so it's sort of interesting really, from a parental perspective.

(...)

**MARISSA** (mother): so it's a really tricky one, as- as a parent because... when Cassiopea got her phone quite a lot later than a lot of her friends—

**CASSIOPEA** (child, 12): A **lot** later

**MARISSA**: (pause) and, um, that in itself, she felt excluded her from social situations at school, like... parties and things

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

In Paul's case, the decision to give their child access to social media was complicated by their own feelings about what was appropriate versus the social costs to the child for not having

social media. For that family, social media was not held in high regard by any of the members, but the child also struggled to cultivating connections at school, and thus having a personal mobile phone and social media was seen as necessary to foster inclusion. According to the parents, the cost-benefit analysis of allowing their child on social media had less to do with outsider threats, and more with the child's social inclusion and emotional wellbeing in the friend group.

While the Rose family were the only family where peer pressure was felt in such a negative light, there were plenty of examples from the other participants where the usage of social media was peer-motivated. Some of the positive ways in which peer pressure was enforced have already been examined in chapter four, section three. But a closer analysis of the children's testimonies reveals an anxiety about social connections and their maintenance:

**CHANDA:** Like I enjoy Instagram, and just talking to my friends really. I just talk to my friends more than I should talk to them in real life so it's... quite... important.

\*

**THÉRÈSE:** For me it's mainly just communicating with my friends, just some information, not much...

\*

**IOAN:** Social media, probably just talking to your friends when you're not actually talking to them, like on your...screen or device, just being able to talk to your friends when they're not there, um...

\*

**JANE:** It's a way to connect with friends? Like... who you might not necessarily be able to connect with, erm... with text messages, and also you can like take... an influence ideas from it, so like Pinterest, you can... if you want to make something, it can influence you... and... you can... erm... but, I don't know, you can just talk with friends on it, that's what I do with it.

\*

**CASSIOPEA:** (shyly) It's a way of um... contacting my friends.

- Excepts, various interviews.

The discourses around children and youth tend to focus on the individual actors and the risks they choose to take (Mitchell et al, 2001, cited in Kemshall, 2008). However, if social media technologies are risky for children (McBride, 2011; NSPCC, 2015) then it is necessary to examine the whole picture, including the role their friends play in getting them in virtual space and keeping them there.

The quotes above highlight that for children, more so than for parents, social media is a means of socialising. Unlike the adults, children did not talk so much about meeting friends in physical spaces, or organising meetups and activities, or having get-togethers outside of school. This could be explained by peer pressure (“everyone is on (social media)”, Gweb) but it could also be a manifestation of what boyd (2015) described as children being driven away from public spaces.

This relates to the findings of the previous chapter with regards to geographic distance. While in some cases social media was the one way to meet due to a lack of access to physical space, the other side of the coin is that for some children, physical space is just not safe. Even if this view was challenged by the parents (as Isabella and Adam did), and even if parents tried to encourage their child to spend time outside (as Akhila and Suraj did) there are limits to that influence. If, as the children interviewed for this thesis showed, a child's whole social circle is spending their time online, then the child left in the physical world (without access to social media) would be the one missing out.

What this section has shown is that peer pressure is a key factor – for children as well as for adults, for individuals as well as for families – in going on social media and staying engaged with social media. It shows that parents are far from rational actors with regards to their approaches to digital parenting and might explain why some of the parents felt uneasy with the advice given to them (more in chapter six). Notes from the government (HMIC, 2015b; Morgan and Department for Education, 2015; Department for Education, 2018) focus on children as individuals, not as part of a peer group, which as seen from this section can make it more difficult to discuss online safety

concerns. The next section will delve deeper into online risks, regarding the threats introduced by friends.

### **3. Threats introduced by friends**

Where the previous section focused on how friends influenced parents and children to social media technologies, this section will focus on what threats friends introduced to the shared virtual spaces. The analysis of the data revealed two main types of “insider” threat: the first with regards to cyberbullying, and the second when an untrustworthy person made their way into a “safe space” by virtue of being a “friend of a friend”. As cyberbullying has been covered more by literature, this will be the topic of the first sub-section, followed by the section on the “friend of a friend”. This will then lead into the final section of this chapter, which is about threats introduced by authority figures.

#### **3.1 When bullies want to be friends online**

In the data, cyberbullying was one of the most cited concerns for parents and children – sometimes because of their personal experiences (Cassiopea) or because of what they had heard previously about social media (Christopher, Jane). The concern about cyberbullying was a theme in children’s testimonies as well as those of their parents and those of gatekeepers as well:

**JOE** (community centre staff): well, one of the biggest risks is bullying (...) because I think when I was a little boy, and I’m only (age), when I was a little boy you got bullied in the playground, now children are getting bullied at 3 in the morning in the bedroom.

- Excerpt, gatekeeper interviews

**CASSIOPEA**: Cause they discuss them on their own and stuff and on their contacts and I couldn’t do that, and I remember... thinking I couldn’t do that, and also that I used, I had a phone, like a digital machine, but I couldn’t use it to text or anything, and I used to give out my mum’s phone number (laughs) saying it was mine because... I felt so excluded by it, because I didn’t have the best situation in primary school

- Excerpt, Rose family Interview

**CHRISTOPHER:** Erm, sometimes, yeah, sometimes it is quite bad, some things are bad that other people post, and they put, some people just ignore and it continues, and they just... and it's also another way for bullies to go on-online and keep on bullying people, which is worse, cause you don't know who you're getting bullied by.

- Excerpt, Newton family Interview

**LUCINDA (mother):** So that's something that makes me feel... quite anxious, it's obviously what she can find, on social media, as she gets older, and then obviously, a long way into the future, but it'll go very quickly, is how she deals with her peers, on social media, and the whole Facebook bullying thing, because even though obviously it's not an issue now, I know for instance for colleges is-is a massive issue, cause I work for... college, education, as part of the university, and it is a huge safeguarding issue, and that is something that now, I'm kind of like, anxious about and want to manage her social media usage, and teach her about it from quite a young age, really.

- Excerpt, Hope family interview

The narrative of bullying carrying over from the playground and into the bedroom is a common one for cyberbullying literature – there is no limit to the reach of the bully, and the aggression can continue long after the original attack occurred, in the form of insulting pictures and posts (Mishna, Saini and Solomon, 2009; Law et al., 2012; Bonanno and Hymel, 2013). The participants in this study were aware of the limitations of social media technologies, and their criticisms of the platforms themselves have been examined in Chapter Three.

What has not yet been examined is the question of what makes it so difficult for children to shut down the bullying. This is a pertinent question, because it relates to one of the most common risks for social media users, and because it challenges the notion that abuse online is the doing of strangers and mean peers (Morgan and Department for Education, 2015; Department for Education, 2018). The government guidelines emphasise empowering victims to stand up for

themselves – but this is not the case, as seen by the anxiety participants reported in the quotes above. (Assuming, of course, that their schools followed the official guidelines when teaching them about online safety and social media.) This suggests there is a question of proximity involved – that the cyberbullying comes from within the friend group (community) and that the view that bullying can be solved by ignoring the aggressor does not apply anymore.

The literature on cyberbullying does not go much further than describing it as bullying through electronic means, an “intentioned and repeated aggression that involves disparity between victim and perpetrator” (Olweus, 1993, cited in Lituiller and Brausch, 2013:675). What is missing is context about the relationship, because the data show it makes a difference in how the participants approached the potential risk.

In the game, known bullies were treated as hostiles by the participants by default.

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): Okay, that’s alright, it’s meant to be someone you don’t get along with in your (class) so who would you say you don’t get along with—

(...)

**JOSEPHINE**: I’m sending you something, and I’m going ‘hey’ and saying ‘do you want to, um, connect with me’ do you want to be friends with someone you’re not friends with, so [name] someone you don’t get on with at school, what do you want to... do, do you want to talk to me about it, do you want to ask me questions, or do you want to block me,

**ALYS** (child, 9): Questions?

**JOSEPHINE**: You can ask me, what do you want to ask me, or do you want to, you can just block me so that you can’t be my friend, I can’t be your friend...

(buzzer goes off)

(...)

**PAMELA** (child, 11): What was your **intention** mum?

**RESEARCHER**: Yeah what was it?

**JOSEPHINE:** Bullying you, so it's a good thing you blocked me

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

In this excerpt the decision-making process of the child was short – they did not ask many questions and they did not engage very long with the scenario. This was also a common trend for this type of scenario – it came up in seven families, it was posed to both parents and children, and in all cases they blocked the card. Just one child was unsure and asked more questions to determine whether they wanted to continue with the interaction or not, but the outcome was the same for them as it was for the other participants who got that scenario.

The same process repeated itself when the scenario posed to the participants was about “friends that fell out”. There were two similar scenarios, both trying to continue the argument into virtual space, but most participants that blocked it did so without asking further questions. The one who attempted to reason with the person causing the aggression was a mother (Isabella, Frank family), who did not block the person in the game but tried to set up a face-to-face meeting to reach an agreement.

This relevant, given the importance of friends in influencing other friends to go and stay on social media. The community is a determinant in getting the participants on social media, but it is also a factor in how they handle risk on social media. The participants did not treat community members as allies – indeed, the participants acted as though they took it as given that involving members of their online social circle was undesirable. What the game scenarios suggest is that for children previous bad behaviours invalidate any friendship that the person might have with them, and this extended to both current connections, older friends (childhood friends), or even casual connections. The next quote offers an example of that reasoning:

**MARGE** (mother): So now I'm a schoolmate of yours and the background erm...that we-we usually get along, but not so much these days, and they said some mean things about you, (...)

**JANE** (child, 12): I know you're not a catfish, but I would not, I don't, I don't want to talk to you.

**MARGE:** but I'm just

**JANE:** can I say that?

**RESEARCHER:** yeah

**MARGE:** But I'm um,

**JANE:** does it mean I'm saying they're a catfish?

**RESEARCHER:** no, it does, it just means you don't want to talk to them

(buzzer goes off)

**MARGE:** Oh, my goal was to apologize for having said mean things....

**JANE:** No, you said mean things about me. I don't want to talk to you.

- Excerpt, Newton family interview.

The above quote is an interesting example of boundary-setting and cyberbullying. In the previous three scenarios, the goal on the card was “bullying”. In this one, the goal is to apologize, but for the child, that still was not good enough and that previous bad behaviour meant that the person now had to be excluded from virtual space. What this shows is that the participants’ desire to be part of a community of friends does not extend to people whose behaviour is questionable. This adds to the conclusions from the previous chapter that, while children go on social media, they are more critical and discerning about the ways in which they use and consume it than the literature (Turel and Serenko, 2012; Morgan and Department for Education, 2015; Bányai et al., 2017) suggests.

Indeed, it is worth exploring further the gap between expected and actual behaviour from children on social media. Analysis of the gatekeeper interviews showed that professionals working with children were not optimistic about the children’s ability to stay safe online. School professionals, who accepted speaking to the researcher off the record, talked about having difficulties with cyberbullying that they could not address because it was not occurring on school grounds. While schools have a duty of care to their pupils, what emerged from those exploratory conversations was that schoolteachers were unsure about what they could and could not do. People who ran groups at community centres talked about cyberbullying in abstract terms, but not in any

concrete way. To them, the solution is the intervention of the parents, as exemplified by the following quote:

**LOGAN** (gatekeeper): Yeah, I think, um... Yeah, I do think so, I think that parents do have to exercise a responsibility, um, and there is just more options these days with social media. I know... of one parent who ordered their son to remove something from Facebook I think because it was inappropriate or, you know, just just just not suitable, so yeah, I think the community have a responsibility, um, you know, there's always been rebels and they post stuff that you would never post yourself (quiet)

- Excerpt, gatekeeper interview.

Such views were common among gatekeepers and were shared by some of the parents that the researcher spoke to outside of the main interviews. However, within the context of the family group interview, the validity of such views – that the way to keep children online safe is through control – is called into question. The participating families rely more on trust and mutual respect than on overt control, as will be seen in the next chapter. As seen from the previous section, parents are not immune to peer pressure with regards to using social media technologies. As seen from this sub-section, children are critical of who they engage with online. Indeed, when examining the cyberbullying scenarios from the game, it was the parent who tried asking more questions, and it was the parent who engaged with the bully more – not the children.

The data also furthers the understanding of community. More than being “a group of people living in a particular locality or who have a certain shared interest, who engage in systematic interactions with one another” (Giddens and Sutton, 2017:117), it is a more fluid environment where allegiances shift and cutting ties with bullies is made more difficult by the previous proximity between victim, bystanders, and aggressor. This finding explains why family practices around social media can be complicated. It is also relevant with regard to the next section, which is when risk comes under the guise not of a friend, but someone they know.

### **3.2 The “friend of a friend” insider threat**

Most high-risk scenarios in the game involved cases of identity impersonation (catfishing) as this is a common risk brought up in online safety campaigns, almost as often brought up as

cyberbullying. Out of the forty-seven high risk scenarios that were played across all groups, participants asked questions on four of them, and all of them involved a person who was either a distant friend, or a friend-of-a-friend.

The previous sub-section showed that participants were willing to enforce interpersonal boundaries with bullies and close friends who had become abusive. However, when the question concerned a person they knew as a very casual acquaintance, their interactions became lengthier, with more questions being asked and more hesitation being expressed before the participant blocked the risky scenario. This occurred with both parents and children and was the subject of much discussion.

The following quote is an example of such a scenario. It also represents a scenario where the child allowed a risky interaction to continue instead of blocking the stranger's account:

**THÉRÈSE** (child, 11): Okay. I'm a stranger.

**DEBORAH** (child, 13): Oh, this is for me.

**THÉRÈSE**: We have chatted in a watsapp group with your friends, but you don't really know me personally.

(noise)

**DEBORAH**: Okay, so you're a **stranger**, but we've **chatted**.

**THÉRÈSE**: Yeah, we've chatted together in a group with

**DEBORAH**: So technically you're a friend of a friend.

**THÉRÈSE**: yeah, technically

**RESEARCHER**: someone added you to the group, basically.

**DEBORAH**: Wait, do I know the people in the group?

**THÉRÈSE**: yes, the people in the group are your friends and they've added me. So we've chatted.

**DEBORAH:** I mean, if it's going to be on the same social media and it was added to a Wattapp conversation, and you... wanted to talk some more, then okay.

**THÉRÈSE:** Okay, well, that was a really dumb decision, because I'm a creep, and I just want pictures of your house for some really weird reason.

- Excerpt, Lys family interview

What this vignette represents is the notion of “insider threat” taken to one of its possible conclusions. However, unlike the insider threats in cybersecurity and management, where risk is introduced by an employee in a company (Cole, 2007), the insider threat in this case represents a risk that was introduced by someone trusted in a child's social circle.

An “insider threat” does not have to just come from strangers that friends let in a group chat, however. Many of the vignettes that were available included similar scenarios, such as friends falling out, classmates falling out, friends-of-friends becoming bullies, and friends of the family falling out with parents. What those vignettes have in common, following the analysis, is how having friends in common made the participants hesitate about the vignette's goal.

Deborah's thought process, which is quoted above, represents how the insider threat is normalised in interactions in the social circle. Scenarios that involved “strangers” were treated as risky in most families and scenarios; here, the account had had some previous interaction with the child (“you're a stranger, but we've chatted”). The account is presumed to be authentic because they share friends in common (“so basically you're a friend of a friend”), and, most important, those friends are presumed to have added the account to the group. These details lend legitimacy to an account the child would have otherwise treated with suspicion and lead to them allowing a private chat with that person.

The details are not dissimilar to what Kandias and colleagues cite as the common identifiers of insider threat: “logical or physical location, authorization, expected behaviour, motivation, and trust” (Kandias and colleagues, 2010:26).

- While the interactions occur online, the location is logical because they are “on the same social media”.

- The behaviour is expected – if the child has interacted with that person in a virtual group setting, it makes sense to also interact in a virtual private setting.
- The motivation of the person reaching out is not revealed to the participant posing the questions until the end of the game scenario, but they assume it is to continue the interaction.
- The child trusts the account because they assume their friends trust it as well.
- This process leads to the authorisation of the private interaction.

This process of decision-making occurred for most of the high-risk scenarios that the participants allowed or allowed with caution. Both adults and children attempted to verify the person’s identity, checked if they had friends in common, and then accepted the interaction to continue. A threat introduced by friends meets all of those tests, but it is a threat nonetheless. This process is further synthesised in Figure Sixteen, which examines how insider threats are perpetuated in the family context:

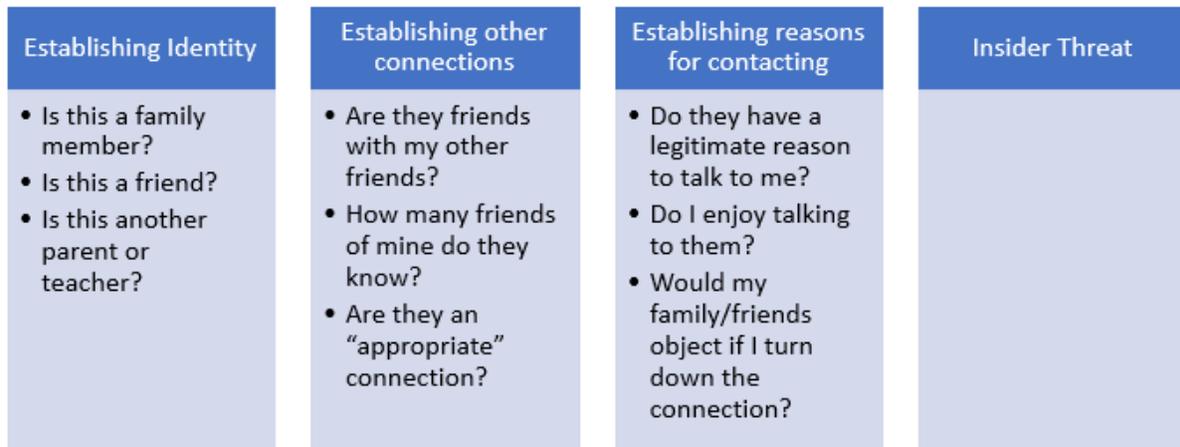


Figure 16: Perpetration of insider threats in the family context

In other words, while the three tests described in Figure Sixteen were sufficient to protect the participant in a high-risk scenario, they were based entirely on the premise that a member of the person’s social circle would never mean them harm. The tests might meet the common sense approach to cybersecurity displayed by the participants: “don’t talk to strangers” but they assume that no harm could possibly arise from a friend, a friend-of-a-friend, or an authority figure.

Once the real goal was revealed, the participants blocked the account. However, outside the context of the game, the real goal (and risk) would not be revealed in such a clear way: “I’m a creep, and I just want pictures of your house for some really weird reason” (Marigold family interview). Academic literature on online grooming highlights that abusive and isolating behaviour tends to occur in stages, and aims to erode the victim’s ability to seek help (Whittle et al., 2013a, 2013b). Similarly, literature that looks at terrorist engagement and radicalisation points out the role of functional trust in starting the relationship (Braddock and Morrison, 2018). From the discussions between Thérèse and Deborah, they do not see the potential risk – but the wider implication is that children and families are largely left vulnerable to insider threats.

This highlights the gap between literature and practice again. Children are conceptualised as high- and low-risk takers based on how likely they are to suffer from an “online disinhibition effect” (Whittle et al., 2013a) or because they are seen as risk-seeking (Armstrong, 2004, cited in Kemshall, 2008). No attention is given to insider threats and how children who might otherwise present as low-risk takers might find themselves in a high-risk scenario.

The question of insider threat is further evident in game scenarios that included authority figures and other trusted adults. It demonstrates a gap in the risk society theory in that it shows what occurs when a “community” is interfered with, or when a “community” does not look out for its members. Beck’s risk society theory (Beck and Ritter, 1992) captures a lot on the macro level, for example as a way of explaining environmental crises and climate change, and how a “community” of people can help combat risk production. However, risk society is not sufficient to explain how, on a micro level – in friendship circles or small cliques – risk is still reproduced. And, as the next section will show, risk can be reproduced within a community even when verification did not come through friends.

#### **4. Threats introduced by authority figures**

The previous section examined “insider threat” when it was introduced by friends, both close and distant. It revealed that previous relationships, or perceived relationships, made the participants hesitate before blocking the risky scenario. What this section will look at is insider threats from authority figures, which the analysis has classified as follows: risk introduced by

parents of friends and relatives, and risk introduced by those who impersonate authority figures (like teachers).

#### **4.1 Threats introduced by parents-of-friends and relatives**

In the question-and-answer part of the family group interview, the topic of insider threat and authority figures did not come up. In the game, however, there were a handful scenarios that involved high- and medium-risk interactions with relatives, parents-of-friends, and other adults from the family's social circle.

Scenarios included friends-of-the-family who had become argumentative, relatives who were behaving in an argumentative manner, and parents-of-a-friend was contacting a child because of something mean they had said. In one family, the latter scenario was posed to a child who, at first, could not imagine this situation occurring in the first place; the child then made a suggestion and asked the group if that was the appropriate response. The mother then asked if the child would have a conversation like that with an adult online. Angela, the child's sibling, interjected:

**ANGELA** (child, 13): I would not

**PAMELA** (child, 11): I would ask you guys and then—

**ANGELA**: that's what I would do, I would go to you (Josephine) and say 'look, I didn't... I, I, I was mean to this person and I shouldn't have been, what'd you think I should do in this situation?' Like, cause I might say to the adult online, I might say 'okay then I will apologize to them' and that's the end of it, you know

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

This scenario highlights another risk area that is not covered by literature on cyberbullying (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Bonanno and Hymel, 2013), namely what should be done when there is boundary pushing done by a trusted adult (like a relative) or an authority figure (like a teacher). In this scenario, the adult was someone the child knew, a parent of a friend – therefore, not a stranger or otherwise a person that would be associated with a high level of risk – but what they were doing was inserting themselves in an argument where they were the person who had more power, instead of addressing a concern to someone with an equal standing (i.e., another

adult). This was pointed out by another adult, after their child blocked the same scenario in another group:

**SARAH** (mother): You can, you can also tell me, and then I can phone them up, and talk to them, offline

**RATNA** (child, 15): parents arguing (Note: Seems unhappy)

**SARAH**: well, wouldn't argue, but... talk to her and see-see what they think if there is anything that could make it better

- Excerpt, Baker family interview

The reasons why the child seemed unhappy with the proposed solution will be explored further in Chapter Six. With regards to risk from authority figures, however, what is interesting is that the participants did not block outright, but rather attempted to apologise and reason with the person. This was true for both parents and children: in her scenario, Pamela was confused, Angela said she would apologize before blocking, Ratna attempted apologising several times before declaring “I don't know what else to say” and blocking, and Isabella (a mother) attempted to apologise several times before suggesting she and the other parent go get the school involved in settling the dispute. In terms of length of engagement, that is a lot more than participants tended to allow for argumentative strangers and even argumentative friends

Similar trends can be seen in the other scenarios that involved authority figures and friends-of-the-family. A scenario where a relative-turned-multi-level-marketer targeted them with their sales efforts caused the adults a lot of difficulty:

Josephine, for example, was uncomfortable with blocking outright – it was one of the children who pressed the block button after she said that “okay, well... I don't use (name of product) so we-we will find a different way to keep in touch.” However, after that part of the game was finished, the mother clarified that she would not have gone ahead with blocking, if it was a relative she got on with – but rather she would have hidden everything from the person's timeline and allowed the friend request to come through, so that they would not be “offended” because they wouldn't know. Akhila, another mother, said she would allow the interaction because she wanted

to support a relative's business. Children who got that scenario blocked without question, but the adults expressed a desire to keep the communication channels open and supportive.

What this shows, compared to the findings of the previous sections, is that participants presented a higher tolerance for risk when it came from authority figures and family members than they did if it came from friends or strangers. Even with regards to insider threats, the children were more cautious than they were with trusted adults. This has implications about the role of authority and social connections in risk management and trust, and how the literature represents social media risks to children.

Literature treats children as being at risk (Mishna, Saini and Solomon, 2009; McBride, 2011; Whittle et al., 2013b), or classifies them as high and low risk-takers (Whittle et al., 2013a) with the former more vulnerable than the latter. However, the findings suggest that even those who present as low risk takers can be vulnerable if a threat comes from someone they trust and obey – more so than if the threat comes from a friend or a peer. This challenges somewhat the role of community as it is seen in risk society: where Beck saw community as an antidote to the risk production of individualisation, the findings imply that this is not the case, and that having a “community” by itself is not a guarantee for reducing risk production. Indeed, in theoretical terms, the findings show that a community that is not resilient is more vulnerable to risk.

This in turn has implications about parenting literature as well as practice. While the family is perceived as a “private” space, separate from the demands of public life (Ribbens McCarthy, 2008) it is nonetheless seen that parents are mindful of how their parenting decisions might be judged by their peers (Harman and Cappellini, 2015). As such, the finding that threats introduced by “other parents” or “authority figures” might be tolerated for longer is an alarming one – especially when looking at the final subsection in this chapter, which asks the question of what happens when a predator takes on the identity of a trusted adult, or an authority figure.

#### **4.2 Threats introduced by identity impersonators**

While the game scenarios did not include violent or sexual scenarios, they did include a fair number of “catfish” or identity impersonation cards. The ease with which someone could assume a different identity online was an oft-cited risk in the gatekeeper interviews, and as such, it played a key part in the game itself. A “catfish” could present as anybody – a friend, a childhood friend,

a public figure – but the most relevant responses that were given to such scenarios were for when the stolen identity was that of a trusted person or an authority figure.

One such scenario was if a teacher contacted students on social media. The reason given for the contact was to remind students of their homework. This scenario was met with mixed responses across the families. A couple of children, Gwen and Joao, started to allow the interaction with caution – Gwen in a playful manner, Joao less so (Joao blocked the person after the goal was revealed.)

**IOAN** (child, 11, reading from card): okay next, I'm a teacher, my background is ... I work in your school, and I want to make sure that everyone got-got their homework done.

**GWEN** (child, 13): Why would you?

**ADERYN** (mother): NO!

**GWEN**: Why would [**they**] be contacting me if you're a teacher?

**ADERYN**: No, why would they be contacting you?

**IOAN**: Mommy, no, mommy, I'm doing that to Rowan, now I have to do another one (forlorn)

**ADERYN**: No, but do you not get that this is obviously a no?

**IOAN**: Yeah?

**ADERYN**: Okay, that's alright then

**LIAM** (father): Gwen, did you get it?

**GWEN**: (exasperated) yeah!

**ADERYN**: No, but why would your teacher have your, where were they contacting you on?

**GWEN**: Instagram

**ADERYN:** Totally inappropriate teacher behaviour!

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview.

It is interesting that this was the only time during an interview where a parent felt the need to interrupt in the game, rather than wait to see how their child would react. In most cases, even with high risk scenarios, parents would hold off on commenting. In this case, however, the parent felt the need to interject, even if their child was teasing. This reaction was also not repeated among other participants. Some children were cautious but confused about the scenario because their schools had a practice for contacting their students online for the purpose of homework and other school business. Deborah, for example, was suspicious, but asked the group anyway because while their teachers did not contact them on social media, they did email from official school email addresses. Andromeda was curious as to what platform the teacher was contacting them on, as the school itself had a social media-like messaging board that they used to distribute homework and timetables.

All these data points bring several conclusions to mind: First, that some of the children's schools had normalised a practice where teachers contacted students online. Second, that parents recognized that teachers are not supposed to contact children on social media, but that the children did not. Third – and perhaps most relevant to this project – is that children conflated forms of communication such as email with social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. The latter point was apparent in the question and answer section as well, where children conceptualised all “technology-facilitated communication” as “social media”, but the full implications of it were apparent in the scenario discussed above.

Much has been written about youth cultures and peer pressure, and how peers might normalise certain forms of deviance (Harakeh and Vollebergh, 2012; Black, Devereux and Salvanes, 2013; Iwamoto and Smiler, 2013). What this finding shows is that there is also institutional pressure on the part of some of the children's schools, and a normalisation of certain practices that might be seen as risky from the perspective of an outsider. It is unclear whether the usage of social media and email for school business was accompanied by a safety lecture – however, the parents' contributions in the interviews suggested this was not the case. This is relevant because participants tended to view online communications as “social media” regardless

of whether it was condoned by the school or not. Why parents would feel unsupported by schools is something that will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six – what is relevant for risk introduced by identity impersonators is the culture of schools and how it might contribute to making the risk-adverse children more vulnerable.

Another case of identity impersonation that both parents and children were confused about was when the “catfish” took on the identity of a childhood friend:

**DEBORAH** (child, 13): Um (pause) so this is directed to Mum. Okay, so it’s a childhood friend, who you... so you used to like each other a lot, um, but then, you moved away. Um, she doesn’t give too many details about what’s happening right now.

**MANON** (mother): So she’s probably trying to reconnect, and um, I would probably accept, because, it does correspond to my erm history

**THÉRÈSE** (child, 11): it’s a situation that did happen.

**MANON**: and there are a lot of people I would love to reconnect with. Um, so if their name is a name that I recognize, and they’re very

**DEBORAH**: So it would be yeah

**MANON**: So yeah, I would probably accept.

**RESEARCHER**: Would you... check other things on their profile?

**MANON**: Nn, probably not, unless I really didn’t like them at the time.

**THÉRÈSE**: but you liked each other a lot

**MANON**: So we liked each other a lot, so I would assume they stayed true to themselves and...

**DEBORAH**: so their goal was to catfish you

**MANON**: No!

**DEBORAH:** and steal your personal

**THÉRÈSE:** that's why I don't think that much info, you should always check your information

**MANON:** wow....

**RESEARCHER:** the things you learn

**THÉRÈSE:** it, it **did** say specifically they didn't give too much information, if they **don't**, it's a bad idea

**DEBORAH:** if they don't give too many details you should check.

**MANON:** (whispers) Ouch

- Excerpt, Lys family interview

This is an interesting case because there were clues that the children picked up on that the parent did not; it testifies to a different kind of savviness that they have developed with regards to spotting risk. In other scenarios, the children always cross-referenced details on the profile (mutual friends, important personal information) before allowing a contact; so for them, a scenario where they were not given too many details was treated as suspicious. Trust was not a given – it had to be cross-verified, even in a case where they were contacted by a “friend of a friend.” It demonstrates that the children were far more suspicious than the parents.

The outcome shows another point of vulnerability. In other families, even if the card was blocked, the parents spent time talking to the person and asking questions, rather than restricting their access. The same thing occurred if the “catfish” took on the identity of a relative or family friend. In some cases the participants blocked “genuine” friends-of-the-family cards in the game if something about the answers made them hesitate. In one scenario, for example, Jane (11) and Christopher (9) were acting out what would happen if a friend of the family reached out to the younger sibling, looking to reconnect. The “friend” was able to answer some identifying questions that Christopher posed to them, but when they started asking questions of their own, Christopher went ahead and blocked them. The next quote shows the rationale behind the questions and the mother's commentary:

**JANE:** I needed to know where he lived because I wanted to catch up with him, and I needed to know how old he was because I didn't know him that well

**MARGE:** but interestingly, at that point, y-you would be the one volunteering more information because you were the one who... but if that person isn't going to come forward with all the information then that need, then that sends and alarm bell to you guys because you needed to...

**JANE:** but I needed to know his address

**MARGE:** you would come forward and say, surely you would come forward and say, hi, I'm a friend of [name] and [name] she used to live in Hertfordshire and I'm trying to find, I'm trying to catch up with [name] I know she mentioned that you guys had moved to Bath but

**JANE:** yeah but I didn't know that

**MARGE:** you didn't know that, but Christopher thought that was also right because you weren't forthcoming with information. Were you? You used to be less holding back, if-if that was the real situation?

**RESEARCHER:** it's interesting... how different people communicate online, because I've had, you get very interesting re-responses from everyone, everyone does these cards differently

**MARGE:** yeah

- Excerpt, Newton family interview

The above situation could be interpreted as a misunderstanding due to differing communication styles, which is what the researcher suggested. However, a bigger question is why an adult friend of the family would reach out to a child rather than another adult. The situation echoes some of the ones from the previous subsection, where risk was introduced by trusted adults – there was an uneven distribution of information, but also an uneven distribution of power. Where a teacher might have a justification for contacting the child online, or a childhood friend might attempt to reach out after a long separation, adults reaching out to children just to catch up raised

an alarm. In other words, there is a lack of “expected behaviour” (Kandias et al, in Katsias et al, 2010:26), but in this case, the perceived insider threat is from a member of the family social circle, not from inside an organisation.

The findings from this sub-section are two-fold:

The first is that there may be an aspect of institutional normalisation of risk that makes participants more vulnerable online. A “catfish” impersonating an authority figure could benefit from reasonable doubt created by similar practices in a school. This suggests, as with the previous sections in this chapter, that the onus is not just on the individual participants (Whittle et al., 2013b, 2013a) or even on individual families (Valcke et al., 2010b; Eynon and Helsper, 2015) to keep themselves safe online.

The second is that expected behaviour had a large role to play with regard to how long an interaction was allowed to go on with an authority figure. Compared to the findings from the previous sub-section, which suggested a greater willingness to enforce boundaries with friends than with casual acquaintances, it would appear that the less intimate the connection, the more participants relied on expected behaviours to dictate their own safety practices.

## **5. Discussion**

This chapter addressed the question “What are the key factors influencing social media practices within the family?” by examining the social circle of the families, and the ways in which the participants responded to different kinds of insider threats. It built on the findings of the last chapter that pleasure (from virtual co-presence with one’s community for example) is one of the driving forces behind the participants’ usage of social media technologies, and questions one of the main tenets of risk society, which is that community dissolution has led to higher risk production (Beck and Ritter, 1992). The way that chapter approached its criticism of risk society was through asking the question of whether having a community is by itself enough to diminish risk.

What was argued in the chapter is that “community” alone is not enough. The findings highlighted the spatial and relational aspects of risk in the social media environment – that sometimes, risk was introduced through peer pressure (to get on and stay on social media), through

friendships that changed (both from friends becoming bullies, and friends-of-friends who could not be trusted), and through trusted adults and authority figures. Indeed, the cohort displayed varying levels of risk tolerance, regardless of how risk-adverse the participants presented themselves as, which was influenced by the proximity to the aggressor. In some cases, the greater the proximity (the more the person was part of the community) the bigger the risk tolerance.

Peer pressure was one of the themes that were anticipated from the gatekeeper interviews and literature review. The importance children gave to the opinions of their friends, and to virtual co-presence (McBride, 2011; O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Harakeh and Vollebergh, 2012; Black, Devereux and Salvanes, 2013; Iwamoto and Smiler, 2013), was something that the researcher anticipated to find in the interviews. What the researcher did not anticipate was that parents would also report feeling peer pressure to be, and then remain, on social media. Nor did the researcher anticipate that parents would express mixed feelings about social media technologies (as seen from Chapter Four). This finding moves the discussion away from the binary idea of adults as rational decision makers and children as irrational risk-takers, as implied in the literature (McBride, 2011; NSPCC, 2015). Instead, it moves it further into the territory of Morgan’s family practices and the continuous risk-evaluation and re-negotiation that occurs with them, (Morgan, 1996; Bauman, 2000) as this definition of family practices fits more with that was observed in the interview cohort. The chapter shows the parents can struggle with peer pressure as much as their children might be on social media. This is further seen in the findings on insider threats and threats introduced by authority figures.

The section on insider threats focuses on two main themes – cyberbullying, and the risk of someone untrustworthy making their way into a safe space by virtue of being “friend-of-a-friend”. The latter aspect was where people hesitated most. The same factors that help qualify insider threats in corporations (Kandias et al., 2010) can also be seen as playing a part in the participants’ decision making. Even when the participants blocked the risky scenario, they were a lot more hesitant about doing so than if they were presented with a clear bullying scenario. From a theoretical perspective, this suggests a possibility for a theory of insider threat in family practices, or at the very least an insider threat model that is based on the ones from corporate and IT literature.

Insider threat is also a theme that manifested itself when the research examined threats from authority figures in the chapter. The more “formal” the relationship became between the

participant and the person introducing the threat (a child and their teacher, a child and the parent of their friend) the more “expected behaviour” played a part in how the person managed the risk. This is not a new finding – the fact that we adjust our behaviours according to context (Goffman, 1959) – but it is interesting because security practices and risk management from these participants seem unexpected. The cohort of research participants – parents and children alike – presented as low risk takers in their interviews. Yet, when faced with the choice of blocking a friend or blocking an argumentative authority figure, they chose to block a friend without further discussion, but had longer interactions with the authority figures, without examining the power disparities between themselves, and whether the behaviour was appropriate.

The implications of the prolonged interaction with an insider threat have been discussed to some extent in the context of the chapter, but they are worth further examination in this discussion because they relate to practice. If low risk-takers like the participants in this study can be vulnerable to insider threats, then the existing advice and guidance for both parents and education professionals (HMIC, 2015b, 2015a; NSPCC, 2015; Department for Education, 2018) is missing important nuance. The game used in this study was one where risk was revealed clearly, allowing the participants to block the account. “I would block and report as soon as something strange occurred” was a sentiment oft-repeated by the children, yet, in a non-simulated situation, it is unclear whether the child would recognise that something strange had occurred until it was too late. Online grooming, as seen from the literature, begins with the victim grooming themselves, and making them vulnerable to further isolation and exploitation by the predator (Whittle et al., 2013a; Williams, Elliott and Beech, 2013).

Furthermore, the findings of the past two chapters show that the more confrontational the parents became in addressing what they thought was risky or threatening behaviours – by arguing with the child or interrupting a scenario – the more the children pushed back against the interference. The reasons for that will be explored further in Chapter Six, but it is noteworthy that there are limitations as to what parents can do without their children telling them something is wrong – and, as seen from the scenarios explored in this chapter, the children preferred not to get their parents involved, even in situations of adult-on-child online aggression. This hesitation could be interpreted as an individual taking responsibility for managing their own risk (Beck and Ritter,

1992) but there were more layers of meaning revealed in the analysis, which focused on group harmony, expected behaviours, and verification as granted by the social circle.

“Risk society” suggests that growing individualisation drives risk production and that the antidote can be found in building stronger communities (Beck and Ritter, 1992). However, what the findings suggest is that there is a difference between having a community on social media (of friends, of trusted adults, of relatives and family acquaintances) and being surrounded by a community that looks out for you on social media. The sociological definition of community: “a group of people living in a particular locality or who have a certain shared interest, who engage in systematic interactions with one another” (Giddens and Sutton, 2017:117) does not include any explicit statements about looking after one another’s best interests. Protecting each other is implied, but what protecting each other entails varies depending on the context, as the data has demonstrated.

Beck’s risk society was built around questions of environmental collapse and how bigger socio-economic changes were driving the production of risk. The collapse of traditional communities was seen as a crucial factor in wider risk society and in the macro level, it is possible to see how that is the case (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004a). But on a micro level, the researcher struggled to draw a similar picture with the data she had collected from this study. Indeed, to be part of a community on social media, the participants had to navigate a complex web of risk management, social expectations, social hierarchies, implied trust, and explicit trust, between themselves and other members of said community. While children and parents appeared able to manage risk by self-regulating and enforcing boundaries with friends, they were not as confident in blocking the threat when the interaction was from a friend-of-a-friend, or if it came from a trusted adult. In practical terms, this leads to several conclusions:

First, an individual’s online environment is as safe as their least security-conscious connection. One “weak link” in a friend group could authorise access to multiple “insider threats”, sometimes without knowing, as the participants were willing to extend more benefit of the doubt to a friend-of-a-friend, rather than to a stranger.

Second, understanding the culture of social media in the whole social circle, and not just within the family, is important. Practices by schools where teachers are allowed to contact students via email, or through a dedicated social media network, may be appropriate for the school, but they

are also shown to create confusion for the child as to what is and is not appropriate teacher behaviour.

Third, while risk society is built around the idea of individuals as impartial decision-makers, the data suggests that emotion and social expectation are far more influential in the risk assessment process. Both parents and children appeared motivated to maintain group cohesion and to minimise conflict between themselves and other members of their social circle. While bullying behaviour was not tolerated, the participants showed a higher risk tolerance when it came to weaker connections, creating more vulnerabilities that predators and criminals might be able to exploit.

Fourth, perceived social standing and perceived authority had an impact on the participants' approaches to risk online. Risk society talks about the erosions of **institutional authority** as one of the drivers of community dissolution and risk production, (Mythen, 2004a) but what the data is showing is that **individual** authority within a community of people is still very much respected. Functional trust and personal trust (Seligman, 1997, cited in Braddock and Morrison, 2018) also had a part to play - in the game, participants appeared invested in relationships with perceived authority figures like teachers, or parents of friends. This happened even when the situation was becoming inappropriate. This demonstrates that even if institutional authority declined, those institutions and the legitimacy they lent individuals could contribute to risk creation.

The next chapter will therefore look at risk-reduction practices by the family itself. It will look at the family as the smallest possible community unit to see what sorts of gatekeeping practices they engaged in, and what, if any, were their motivations for tolerating insider threats.

## Chapter 6: Risk-reduction practices by parents and children

### 1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to further answer the question: “What are the key factors influencing social media practices within the family?” It will do so by looking at the final set of factors that were found by the analysis as influential: the family practices themselves, through the lens of trust literature. The chapter will look at how the families tailor their practices to minimise risk production. It will seek to fill the gap in literature on unstructured and informal family practices that seek to minimise risk production such as: the parents' work in the background to protect their children, the children's own work to protect themselves, and what role trust plays in how much control parents exercise over their children.

Trust, as defined by Luhmann, is “in the broadest sense of confidence (Zutrauen) in one’s expectations”, and “a basic fact of social life” (Luhmann, 1981, cited from Kindle edition). Luhmann’s conceptualisations of trust have been touched on to an extent within this thesis (Bachmann and Lane, 2009, cited in Morgner, 2018). His assertion that trust is a necessary starting point of any deviation from what is considered “rules of proper conduct” (Luhmann, 1981) is relevant in light of the findings of the previous chapters, where the veneer of authority was seen as justification for participants to overrule their usual responses to a risky situation.

Being a “connective medium” makes trust a crucial part of communications theory (Morgner, 2018) and of social media usage. Given the families interviewed, and the social interactions described in this thesis, trust is not so much about making oneself “blackmailable” (Flashman and Gambetta, 2014) but more about creating a condition for self-disclosure (Whitty and Joinson, 2008).

The link between strong family ties and the likelihood to trust strangers has been explored in literature, with findings suggesting that strong family ties inhibit an individual’s willingness to trust said strangers (Ermisch and Gambetta, 2010). This has implications about the linkage between parenting styles, social media practices, and the ways in which participants approached risk and trust online (Valcke *et al.*, 2010b). However, trust is a complex term that has been interpreted in multiple ways by multiple authors (Braddock and Morrison, 2018). Some of that complexity has been seen so far in the thesis, but it will be explored in more detail in this chapter.

More specific, trust as described by the participants will be revealed as: (1) fluid, (2) context-dependent (Morgner, 2018), and (3) shaped by relationships (Flashman and Gambetta, 2014; Braddock and Morrison, 2018).

Another term that will be used in the chapter is Brown's concept of boundaries (Brown, 2015). The importance of understanding "what is okay and what is not" (Brown, 2015) is all the more crucial in a context where trust on the Internet is fluid and relationship- and context-dependent (Whitty and Joinson, 2008). The effect of those relationships also reflects some of the models that Valcke and colleagues (2010) put forward: the very rules that govern internet usage are dependent on the relationship between parents and children.

Chapters Four and Five have identified several gaps in the literature that lead back to the gaps in current practice and policy regarding children and online safety advice. A lot of them can further be traced to the idea that children's safety online relies on their parents laying down the rules, and the children obeying those rules (NSPCC, 2015). "Obedience" as a term is more often associated with Foucault's governmentality thesis (Dean, 1999) than Beck's risk society (Beck and Ritter, 1992). Nonetheless, "obedience" as a concept is important in the context of family practices because it raises important question: Are children co-producers of the family's social media practices (Morgan, 2011)? Are they obeying rules, or showing their trust? Co-production implies a fluid relationship, more in line with Morgan's family practices theory (2011), whereas obedience suggests a hierarchy of the relationship, where one party makes the rules and the other follows them. Given the findings in this thesis so far, this view appears somewhat limited and requires revisiting.

While Valcke and colleagues identified some families as indeed employing strict, authoritarian methods for risk-management on social media, there were others who were more co-operative in their approach (Valcke et al., 2010b). This chapter will look more at the latter. There is scope to extend the risk society lens to better understand these co-operative approaches, by looking at the idea of "community" once again and how the ways in which people relate to each other in their "social groups of kinship" (Giddens & Sutton, 2014:118) in order to minimise risk. The analysis reveals a relationship between risk reduction practices and trust, which is seen through three themes: children who tended to act as self-gatekeepers, parents who did their

gatekeeping in the background, and families that managed each other through mutual trust and respect.

The chapter will therefore focus its analysis on the roles generosity (Gambetta and Székely, 2014) and self-disclosure play, as well as on the role self-efficacy is perceived to have on one's wellbeing. The chapter will end with a discussion on how trust is the tipping point between control and autonomy in the family's online practices.

From a methodological perspective, this chapter also offers an interesting insight in that it focuses a lot on the children's own practices and stories. Although writers in academe have come a long way to help children tell their stories (Davies, 2014) there is still a gap in the literature with regard to examining children's testimonies in the context of a family group interview. One of the major points that will be made in the next section will be about how children's testimonies change in the presence of their siblings, and how the presence of siblings can change a child's testimony, perhaps more than that of the parent.

## **2. Children as self-gatekeepers**

The previous chapters looked at the external factors that influenced the usage of social media technologies by families – peer pressure, the usefulness of the technology, the pleasure derived from it. The chapters also examined some of the ways in which families approached risks, hypothetical or otherwise, that social media could offer. What has not yet been examined are the family members' willingness to ask for help, the situations when the family members might ask for help, and what practices the children engaged with on top of their parents' rules and gatekeeping in order to avoid risk online. The first sub-section will look at self-gatekeeping as done by the children, in the context of people they talked to and content they consumed. The next sub-section will look at the child's willingness to ask for help, and the reasons they tended to decline doing so.

### **2.1 Self-gatekeeping**

In addition to the rules their parents imposed on their social media usage (to be discussed in the next section), children reported having their own set of principles for using social media. Those principles varied from child to child, but the recurring four were: (1) only talking to friends,

(2) only using “kid” platforms, (3) blocking accounts and content perceived as “inappropriate”, and (4) telling their parents if something was wrong. There was also a fifth rule that emerged from some families – that any risky behaviour would only be “as a joke” – but that will be discussed in more detail in the section on parental gatekeeping. This section will look at those self-gatekeeping rules because they offer an relevant insight into the ways in which children took responsibility for their own wellbeing online.

**IOAN:** Social media, probably just talking to your friends when you’re not actually talking to them, like on your...screen or device, just being able to talk to your friends when they’re not there, um...

\*

**JOAO:** Um, I don’t know. I don’t **really** communicate on the Internet... apart from when I’m playing Minecraft with my friends, so

\*

**CHANDA:** Errr, Snapchat, Watsapp, I Instagram, mostly my **friends**, they um... on there, they’re on there, so I normally go on there to talk to them

- Excerpts, various interviews

The first thing children tended to say in the interview is that they “only” used social media to talk to their friends. Even if subsequent questions revealed that they also spoke to family members and other relatives online, the immediate response to the children was to associate social media with their friendship groups.

In light of the findings of the previous chapters, this is not a surprising rule. What is interesting is that the rule of just talking to friends included a fair amount of self-limiting behaviour to control the flow of personal information. For younger children, it was the parents who managed the content that they saw, but older children gave examples such as limiting their privacy settings (Ratna, Angela, Hanako, Ioan, Joe) or not using certain networks at all (Angela, Hanako, Chanda, Ratna) or just talking to friends online (Therese, Deborah, Chanda, Angela, Ratna).

In some cases, the measures the children took to stay anonymous online were more sophisticated:

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): When, when you were doing the one on the piano the other day, you wanted me to film from an angle because you were doing it in your school uniform

**ANGELA** (child, 13): I was doing it in my school uniform, I remember saying, make sure you

**JOSEPHINE**: take it at this angle so that you don't see the [school logo]

**ANGELA**: because that would help identify the school.

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

As seen from the quote above, ensuring that one spoke to one's friends was not just about which accounts the child spoke to – it was a complicated process of self-monitoring, self-editing, and self-censorship. School uniforms (and pictures of the school) were things this family spoke about at various points of the interview, as identifiers they were looking out for and editing. Privacy was therefore ensured by controlling the flow of information and never putting anything on social media that they didn't want to spread. It is an approach to risk that reflects some organisational culture literature (Creese et al., 2012) as well as some of the advice to parents (NSPCC, 2015) in that it prioritises anonymity. What is interesting is that the children seemed to have decided this themselves – the mother was doing as they asked.

The second rule – restricting themselves to “kid” platforms – was unexpected, as there was not a distinction made in any of the previous literature. However, this was a type of distinction made by the younger children (aged 9-12): they perceived platforms and applications like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to be “for adults”, while other platforms like Snapchat, Minecraft, and Musical.ly were perceived as being “for children”. There was also a third distinction, which was raised by a child when the researcher asked if she used YouTube Kids (Jane: “YouTube kids is for like four year olds, Peppa Pig and all...”)

It is interesting that the distinction between kid platforms/adult platforms was not one that the social media technology itself was enforcing. All of the platforms named by the participants –

Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Musical.ly, Minecraft – have age restrictions in place for users under 13 years of age. They either limit what children under 13 can see and do (Minecraft and YouTube) or have explicit statements on their terms and conditions saying a user has to be 13 or over to use the platform. From what the researcher could glean from the children’s testimonies, and subsequent analysis of the data, the kid platform/adult platform distinction seemed to come from the child’s own social circle. In other words, the child perceived a social media platform to be “for them” if their friends were using it; if it was a platform their parents or older siblings tended to use, it was “for adults”.

The reason for this rule came from a desire to limit exposure to inappropriate content and inappropriate accounts, the third rule the children imposed on their usage of social media technologies. Younger children appeared to have mixed feelings about that: some, like Ioan, seemed to not care much about what platforms they were on; others, like Robin, were keen to be old enough to have their own Facebook accounts. This could be because of personal preference, although their older siblings showed the opposite feelings to the platforms – Gwen presented as a keen social media user, while Michael seemed to be very reluctant about the Internet and made comments in his interview about it not being a big deal.

What children tended to agree on was that inappropriate content was a problem, even if their definition of it was not that clear: Cassiopea just said she did not like being followed by ‘inappropriate people’, and when asked to clarify, said “erm, like, inappropriate pictures”. In another interview, a participant said they reported someone for inappropriate content, after that person made them feel uncomfortable. Angela relayed a story about someone posting too-enthusiastic comments on videos of them singing, which they classified as inappropriate, and her sibling shared about playing a scenario game their father had given her, which had suddenly started discussing characters being raped. The child had responded by deleting the game, but they were frustrated and upset that they had had to see that content. Their sibling responded that it would have been more helpful to have a warning or disclaimer:

**ANGELA:** [...] ‘this contains things of a [...] might be of unsuitable nature’

What this shows about child participants is that they used “inappropriate content” as a catch-all for everything they did not like or want to engage with on social media: from strangers

trying to contact them, to sexualised or violent content. Indeed, participants often expressed a wish to be able to filter their content more and tailor it to their needs. The ways in which the social network was structured, the relative lack of privacy and control over their audiences, were raised in the interview as complaints the participants had.

However, despite their own efforts to filter their space, children did not respond well to attempts on the part of the social media platform and moderators to filter the content they viewed. The next quote is an example of that:

**ANGELA** (child, 13): (S)o it's turning off any videos about LGBT content, or um, mental health issues, or they are not on like the safe moderation [...] So of course I'm not going to turn restriction mode on, because it's the content that I want to see, and I want to be supporting these people. They can't get adverts on their things, they don't earn as much money, because youtube thinks that anything that has the word anxiety, or depression, or bisexual, or anything in the title, that it is mature content. And it's just... I'm just... I'm really, really against that, so I'm not going to turn any of them on, that's just cause of my moral reasons, so...

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

In this quote, Angela was bringing up two separate issues: YouTube's restriction mode putting a block on topics the participant found important; and YouTube's advertiser programme punishing content creators who talked about topics that were not deemed "advertiser friendly". The first problem ties in with the discourse around moral panics and what is appropriate for children to be exposed to (Cohen, 1972; Critcher, 2009; Critcher, 2011). The second is associated with the commodification of social media, the price being put on personal data, and how certain types of content is being incentivised over others. Either way, however, Angela was making clear that having her content restricted for her was not something she was going to put up with. The same rationale can be applied to other children who did not want to be on "adult" platforms, but at the same time did not want to use restriction mode or a "kids" platform because they wanted flexibility in the type of content they viewed and how it is restricted. Moreover, as seen from the

quote above, sometimes the content that is being restricted is not the kind of content the children took issue with (in this case, LGBTQ+ topics and mental health).

So far, the findings from this section, and the rules that children put to their own usage of social media technologies are in line with the individualisation aspects of risk society, in that each child is managing risk with regards to their personal circumstances (Beck and Ritter, 1992). The question is then if they outright reject support from others, or if the level of self-management serves a bigger purpose. The penultimate quote – regarding the game the child had been playing that had turned violent – was one of the few instances where the parent had been informed that something wrong had occurred online. This leads to the final rule about letting parents know when something went wrong – and whether the children engage with it at all.

## **2.2 Unwillingness to ask for help**

So far in this thesis, the children participating have given the impression of taking an individualised approach to risk on social media (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004b). Moreover, the data from children participating in the project seems to have confirmed Beck's thesis that children nowadays are experiencing an unprecedented level of risk and responsibility for their own risk (Beck, 1998, cited in Mythen, 2004). But have all experiences become individualised? This subsection will look closer at participating children's reticence to involve their parents more with their online lives, and whether that reluctance indicates a lack of trust, or a desire to establish oneself as a trustworthy user of the technology.

At the end of Chapter Five, it was remarked that in many scenarios in the game, even some high-risk ones, the children were reluctant to ask for help from the family. Even if they had the option to involve their parents and siblings in the decision-making, they preferred not to. Out of 122 scenarios that were played across 11 groups, 74 were put to children in total. Out of those 74, only 9 times did children put a scenario to the group and asked for advice. However, out of the 48 scenarios that were put to the adults, only 5 were put to the group for advice. In other words, while 1 in 8 scenarios put to the children were ones where they asked for advice, nearly 1 in 10 scenarios put to the adults resulted in the players asking for advice, meaning the reticence to ask for advice could not be explained by the children's ages alone.

Those cases tended to be ones that the participant did not understand, was not sure about, or, as was the case with Alys (child, 9 years old), the person reading the scenario was more creative with their delivery, or changed their tone of voice to not match the interaction.

**ALYS** (child, 9): The person is your schoolmate, except that round, you are good mates, they give lots of details, the profile picture matches the person you know, what are you going to do?

**HANAKO** (child, 13): Wait, what do you want?

[...]

**ALYS: What do I want?**

[...]

**ALYS:** To get along with you—

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): The profile... the profile picture matches all the details; so it'd be like, if [name] so Dms

**PAMELA** (child, 11): But what if they just take a photo of [name]? What if someone just took a photo of [name]?

**JOSEPHINE:** Would you wanna check first or... would you just...

**PAMELA:** Yeah, check with your friend!

**ALYS:** I am your friend (not sure if the participant was going for the Darth Vader voice or if that was an accident)

(laughter)

**RESEARCHER:** That's what... that's what my friends, that's exactly the sort of thing my friends would do, actually.

**ALYS:** Um

**HANAKO:** How much water do you drink a day?

(pause)

**ALYS:** Um, are you really a—

**HANAKO:** You sound creepy, but um, if it didn't (matter) then I would just probably

**HANAKO:** So I would probably.... Go along

**ALYS:** Good,

**HANAKO:** I'll talk to you

(card was safe)

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

This example was interesting in that Hanako did end up going along, despite her reservations. It was also noteworthy because of what Alys highlighted with her delivery - that content is as important as context. The cards that the participants were given did not include any directions beyond the background and goal. Alys showed that an innocent-sounding scenario could be made to appear threatening if the tone with which it was delivered was changed. Much has been written, for example, about nonverbal cues in bullying and cyberbullying (Li, 2007; O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Law et al., 2012) – online, the lack of body language and other nonverbal cues to guide the interaction was found to be an exacerbating cause. This leads to the first main finding of this section, which is that even in a low-risk scenario, the participants were all very aware of the potential for an interaction to turn dangerous.

As far as advice went, in the excerpt above, the aid was not so much solicited as offered by the rest of the group. That interview was lively and unstructured and the participants felt comfortable talking over each other and giving their opinions. Offering opinions was not uncommon in interviews – in fact, oftentimes children felt comfortable chiming in, either during the scenario or after the fact to tell the group how they would have handled it. For example, when Manon (a mother) was asked what she would do if “a relative” tried to contact them on social media, Thérèse and Deborah called out for her to ask her parents. From one side, those reactions could be interpreted as part of the whole of family practices, not just the ones around social media

– as the children feeling comfortable to contribute and having their voices heard. Within the context of the interview, however, the children’s interjection could also be interpreted as an expression of the family practices around risk and trust in social media technologies – as the child repeating something they know from their own experience, or something that they had been advised to do on a previous occasion.

It is worth reiterating here that the children’s views of social media mores and conflict resolution were complex, as seen from some of the testimonies. For example, Thérèse and Deborah had an impromptu discussion on online norms occurred within the interview, discussing an ineffective school response to cyberbullying.

**THÉRÈSE:** Um, we do have a consequence of social media at school, where a few people last year were cyberbullied, so now at school we are not allowed to use our phones at all, before we were allowed to use them outside of buildings, but now we can’t, we’re not allowed to use them at all.

**DEBORAH:** Yeah, but the most ironic thing is that, the people who were cyberbullying somebody else, so there was a year over me, and they’re still allowed to use their phones, everybody under them can’t use their phones anymore; so the people who were actually cyberbullying can... still use their phones... which is... a really dumb decision.

**THÉRÈSE:** Yeah

**RESEARCHER:** Yeah, that sounds counterproductive, isn’t it?

**MANON:** It does

**DEBORAH:** It does, and it’s not really helping anyway, it’s just... yeah,

**THÉRÈSE:** So...

**RESEARCHER:** What do you think would have helped?

**DEBORAH:** I mean, if they were going to like, take, make that rule for that year, and maybe the years above, because for me that’s where it tends to happen,

I mean in my year you haven't seen any cases of cyberbullying, and... I mean... yeah

**THÉRÈSE:** I think maybe... having some conversations, with some...professional people about being more aware of cyberbullies and so, block them immediately and how to react, or, for example, if you know somebody who is cyberbullied, say, say something about it? And also, maybe, if you know who was a bully, by, which you would probably know if the person was cyberbullied you could actually just confiscate their phones and stop them from using their phones for a whole year, in sc, inside of school at all, whilst not actually restricting the other people but saying that anybody caught cyberbullying, their phone will be confiscated for a week, and then be given at the end of the week to the parents.

**RESEARCHER:** hmmm

**DEBORAH:** But... to be honest,

**THÉRÈSE:** it could work

**DEBORAH:** confiscating the phones at school isn't really gonna change anything because they, they could just as well cyberbully the people from home. Unless their phones get taken away as soon as they get home.

**THÉRÈSE:** exactly, what they can do is, the parents can contact the school and they could work together, so that the phone is always completely away from that person for a week, that... would stop anyone from cyberbullying. Because... no-one wants their phone taken away for a whole week.

**MANON:** or a whole month, for the

**DEBORAH:** I think, I think life would not be so certain

**THÉRÈSE:** Maybe a week is not a really big problem, but a month is probably going to experience...

**DEBORAH:** if the phones were banned from school for everybody, yeah, there was going to be some

**THÉRÈSE:** yeah, say if it's really, say if it's just a little bit of online teasing, like, something that's not very nice, but it's not extremely hurtful and... it... doesn't really last very long, maybe just a week, but if it's a repeated experience for multiple students where they verbally abuse people and they say really mean stuff about them and that could actually cause some horrible things in school, and some students have actually committed suicide, which is actually... no, that never happened (in their school) but it does happen a lot for example in movies, where some students are bullied online and there's other people who told them, oh go kill yourself, and things like that, so it happens in movies.

- Excerpt, Lys family interview

When asked about what they think would have helped, the child and their sibling engaged in a discussion about cyberbullying. By responding to a school policy that they found to be impractical and unhelpful, they demonstrated critical thinking, and reflected not just on what they thought was appropriate punishment for online teasing or cyberbullying, but also what could have been done to prevent that, and why the school's existing approach was problematic. Once again, the children were demonstrating a heightened awareness of what was right and what was wrong on social media and offered reasoned arguments that they then attempted to back up with evidence. What all of these testimonies suggest is that the children have been giving these topics a lot of consideration even before their interview took place.

Thérèse also gave an example of her friend being bullied online, and them stepping in to put an end to it:

**THÉRÈSE:** And actually, I did play, on a game, and that kind of qualifies as social game, it's Roadblocks – I still do play that game – and, I joined a game with my friend, and, two other people who were on that server were saying mean things about my online friend, so I just... reported them for bullying, and I told them that, and they left, and that stopped, but I can't permanently stop them from doing that, because... I don't really know about their accounts, and

**DEBORAH:** And they can just create new ones

**THÉRÈSE:** yeah, and they were actually telling her, you know [unintelligible] you have a horrible life, and they were actually telling her to kill herself, and I told them to shut up. Because, that's really rude, and they shouldn't really say things like that about other people. And... since I reported it, I hope it will be seen by the staff and they will actually do something to stop it.

- Excerpt, Lys family interview

In this case, the child's handling of the situation demonstrated that the direct approach was effective in stopping cyberbullying; but more than that, the discussions showed that the children are very aware of what a social media platform can and cannot do, how it can be used, how it can be exploited, and what punishments and rewards need to be implemented to enact change. Those were two major examples of children taking charge of their own wellbeing online – showing an awareness of the limitations of the existing practices and also of what they could do themselves on social media. However, the children did not appear to have a lot of confidence in the moderators of the game, which echoed comments from other family group interviews. All these examples show a general lack of confidence (and trust) on the part of children in the official systems that are put in place to protect them.

Examples of situations where the children had asked their parents for help “in real life” tended to involve situations where the child was being contacted by someone they were not sure about, as seen in the next quote:

**CASSIOPEA (child):** And I actually... do trust my Mum, a lot, a lot, a lot. And basically somebody tried to follow me, that was very inappropriately... commenting on me, and said something, they wanted something with no children, but... I was a child as well, and they were, requesting to follow me, (...) didn't really know what to do, and I thought I was just going to delete them, but then, obviously, I needed to speak to my mother about that, because somebody can't just really request you (...) So, I think, speaking to my mum about that situation helped me come to the conclusion which I did, to block them and then report them for inappropriate content?

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

This, too, appears to be an example of putting trust in familial relationships, the idea that a parent would know best how to handle a situation that made the child uncomfortable (Morgner, 2018). It reflects some findings that people with strong familial ties are less likely to trust strangers on the Internet (Ermisch and Gambetta, 2010). At the same time, the quote does not represent the participants' attitudes toward help from their parents.

Indeed, with regards to asking for help, the children's reactions in the game and in the interview were as varied as their approaches to social media itself. Younger children – Robin, Joao, Christopher, Ioan, Andromeda – did not seem to care much about asking **for** support from their parents, but their usage of social media was limited. Cassiopea and Angela expressed strong trust in their parents. Alys and Pamela seemed unbothered about social media and took issue with the notion that their mother would be worried about them. Gwen seemed happiest to be left alone to handle her usage of social media:

**ADERYN:** see, my concern is, why are you even responding to this? See, cause the fact is that, even if you, you already responded, which is what they want, if it's dodgy

**GWEN: MUM,** this is what I want

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview

Perhaps the above quote is one of the most telling with regards to explaining children's reluctance to involve their parents in their online lives. Previous chapters have offered glimpses of the bigger picture: the pleasure derived from using social media, the growing role in virtual co-presence with friends, the fear of missing out. But this section has demonstrated, more than anything else, children's determination to carve out a space for themselves and to be seen as trustworthy users of social media technologies. More than just handling their own risk (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004b) the children participants created rules and self-imposed limitations in order to demonstrate to their parents that they can handle most their interactions online.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this section. First, the children's testimonies suggest that their online risk management practices are self-led and self-managed. To one extent, this reminds of Beck's conceptualisation of individualised risk whereby responsibility for risk management is taken by the individual, not the group (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004b). Some of the reasons for that individual approach can be traced back to a lack of confidence in the formal institutions (in this case, the official moderators of the platforms) (Mythen, 2004b) but not always, because the children also expressed having a lot of trust in their communities, and their parents especially.

The second main finding of this section therefore pertains to the reasons for the lack of confidence in formal processes. According to Luhmann, trust is "future facing" and "only possible in a familiar world; it needs history as a reliable background" (Luhmann, 1981). As seen from the data, children felt like formal institutions like schools and social media moderators were not up to the task to protect them from cyberbullying, either because of their failure to do anything in the first place (as seen in Deborah and Cassiopea's testimonies) or because they did not enact what the children perceived as meaningful consequences on the bullies (as seen from Deborah and Thérèse's quote from the last section). This does not add anything new to the conceptualisation of risk or trust, but it serves as a reminder that a lot more thought goes into children's risk reduction practices than suggested by official guidance documents or online safety campaigns (Morgan and Department for Education, 2015; NSPCC, 2015; Department for Education, 2018).

Moreover, this section has demonstrated the most evidence in support of a risk society-based formulation of how risk is produced on social media, in that there seems to be a direct link between children's lack of confidence in official structures and their individualised approach to risk. However, the reasons for this lack of confidence are complicated and can be traced back to some of the other findings of this thesis – the perceived pleasure and usefulness derived from social media, and the peer pressure aspect to be on social media. While children expressed having a lot of mixed feelings about being on social media, they were unwilling to involve schools and moderators because they felt like (1) it would not result in meaningful change, or (2) it might hurt them more, because they might be forced to give up using social media too.

This latter concern – that social media is an all or nothing choice – is also the reason why children were hesitant to involve their parents even if they trusted said parents. Previous chapters

hinted at this, where children chose to handle disputes with trusted adults and authority figures themselves, rather than blocking the offending scenario and getting their parents involved. There is an anxiety underlying the children's responses that if their handling of risk on social media is anything less than perfect, it would result in the confiscation of all their devices and the end to their social lives online. This anxiety is something that tends to be overlooked in literature (NSPCC, 2015; United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers, 2019), or interpreted as a sign of "addiction-like behaviour" (Turel and Serenko, 2012; Bányai et al., 2017) and an unhealthy relationship with the Internet (Griffiths, 2019).

While these interpretations are valid, they do not tell the whole story. As seen from this section, some children want to enjoy social media technologies for what they are, and are willing to self-censor and do their own gatekeeping in order to achieve that. For the participants in this study, the anxiety of being less than perfect self-gatekeepers can be interpreted as a justified response to what is perceived as insufficient gatekeeping on the part of the adults.

However, adult gatekeeping is not just about giving and taking away phones, as seen from the next section.

### **3. Parents as hidden gatekeepers**

This section will give an overview of the informal or hidden gatekeeping practices of parents. It will contrast between the "hard gatekeeping" practices (rules and regulations) and the "soft gatekeeping" practices (having informal conversations, observing, bringing a researcher in). It will examine the anxieties that parents report with regards to restricting their children online, but also providing them with the tools necessary to manage their online presence.

#### **3.1 Hidden gatekeeping**

The parents interviewed for this thesis tended to be more permissive in their parenting than authoritative (Valcke et al., 2010b), although the approaches of each individual parent varied from family to family, from authoritative, to permissive, to mixed. In broad terms, the ways in which they supported their children online was through few formal rules and giving them space to learn, lending credence to the idea that digital parenting is a fluid practice that resists formal

classification. However, that is not to say that the parents did not engage in gatekeeping activities. Indeed, what was interesting about their interviews was the amount of hidden gatekeeping activities they engaged in.

A few examples of rules that parents had imposed on their children's Internet and Social Media usage included:

- Not using the Internet-connected device (iPad, iPod, computer, laptop) in their bedrooms.
- Not accepting the friend requests of strangers.
- Using their devices for a limited time.
- Not having their own social media accounts until they were in secondary school.
- Not posting about siblings.

As stated above, the rules were arbitrary and changed from family to family. However, they were articulated and were adhered to by the siblings. By contrast, examples of hidden gatekeeping activities included:

- Reviewing the watch history on the iPad and other shared devices once the child was done with it for the day.
- Changing or erasing the watch history on certain social media technologies (like YouTube).
- Speaking to the children about risks on social media that the parent had read about or heard on the news.
- Speaking to the children about what they had learned in school about social media technologies.
- Speaking to their children about what the parents perceived to be issues about social media, such as materialism or the ease of committing identity fraud.
- Talking to their children about the content they consumed.

Hidden gatekeeping activities were different from formal rules in several ways. First, they did not involve issuing the child with specific directives – the parents framed the hidden gatekeeping activity as part of an ongoing discussion about social media technologies. Second, the hidden gatekeeping activity was something the parent could connect to another material source –

a newspaper chapter, a lesson at school, a child's search or watch history online. Third, the hidden gatekeeping activity focused on shaping behaviours and attitudes, more so than a direct rule – it is not so much about what the child cannot do (no iPads in your room for example), but about shaping the future behaviour, tastes and attitudes of a child (teaching them about hidden advertising and instilling a critical attitude toward YouTubers).

To give an example of such an activity, Lucinda and Malcolm discussed in their interview how they reviewed their daughter, Cressida's usage of the family iPad. They talked about the additional work they did after their child used social media to ensure they did not see anything inappropriate. Those parents were conscious that they could not monitor what their child consumed on social media (in this case, YouTube), and they were also conscious that sometimes the platform would show content to their child automatically (through advertisements, or auto-playing of recommended videos.) As such, the parents spent time after each usage of the device reviewing and editing the "watch" history on the social media platform to minimise the risk of their child seeing any inappropriate content. They were also aware of news stories about YouTube Kids and how inappropriate, even disturbing content made its way onto the platform (Bridle, 2017); and their suspicions about the content were confirmed by their own experiences in observing their child's behaviour:

**MALCOLM:** she starts demonstrating, she starts re-enacting the, the (unintelligible) characters are doing on youtube, so, she would get her own babies here, and she would go, waah, waah, baby's crying, waah, waah, what's wrong with baby, waah, waah, and we just think... she never did that before, and she's... and it's just er... and insight to her...

- Excerpt, Hope family interview

The issue that Lucinda and Malcolm found, since their child was so young, was that the entertainment function of the platform became overshadowed by influencing. In other words, the way in which the child's behaviour changed as a result of social media usage was not something they could get behind, and thus they had to engage in close monitoring and editing of the platform's search history so that the algorithm did not "lead (the child) astray".

Other examples of hidden gatekeeping included the parents talking to their children about chapters they had read about other children behaving badly on social media (Suraj to Chanda), parents discussing the child's consumption of social media-first entertainment (Josephine to Angela), and further discussions about materialism and mores on social media (Paul to Andromeda and Cassiopea; Manon with Thérèse and Deborah; Isabella and Adam with George and Joe).

Indeed, it can be argued that the interview itself was a form of hidden gatekeeping, with more than one parent talking to the researcher in a way which implied their digital parenting practices were being evaluated. Marge's response to her children's answers, halfway through the game, was that she was "very proud" of them. Another family even asked the researcher how they had done at the end.

**MARISSA** (mother): Because we've only recently been... having those discussions, and one of, one of the policies we've discussed is that, f-for them (the children) is not to respond, sometimes not to respond, that they don't have to respond to comments

**CASSIOPEA** (child, 14): Mmm

**MARISSA**: Cause I often think that, that escalates, you know, people misinterpret things, or, you might respond in the heat of the moment, and then regret that afterwards.

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

What the above quote demonstrates is something that the parents alluded to and sometimes discussed once the interview was over, and that was the feeling they had about a perceived lack of support from their wider community (extended family, friends, peers at school, teachers) with regard to supporting children on social media. In debrief, for example, Sarah shared an experience she had with a school head giving a talk on online safety, where the advice was not to give children smartphones and not allow them on the Internet. In Sarah's estimation did very little in offering practical solutions.

During the family group interviews it seemed that the frustration with what was available from schools in terms of education was one of the main draws for people participating in the

project. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the researcher was called upon to take off her “impartiality” hat and don the one of an educator. As noted in one research journal entry: “(in the interview) I am a stern expert (“you must do this, you must not do this”), a peacemaker (“perhaps there is another way of looking at things”), and a clown.” At the end of one interview, after the researcher had put away their recording equipment, a parent asked her how the family had done and how she assessed them. While the remark was said in jest, to an extent it shows an underlying anxiety on the part of the parents about their approach to social media literacy in their family. For their part, a lot of children appeared at the beginning of the interview to expect a lecture about the dangers of social media but relaxed as the hour progressed and the conversation stayed focused on neutral topics. There was a sense that the participants did not view themselves as “experts” in their own experiences, and that being placed in this role during the interview was a new experience.

Whether that approach was beneficial or not to them is yet to be determined. The researcher’s strategy was to minimise her own role as “expert” and to focus on the participants as experts in their experience; this seemed to lessen the anxiety of both parents and children and opened up the conversation towards family practices without judgement or evaluation. The next subsection will look at that anxiety in more detail.

### **3.2 Adult anxieties over social media technologies**

Data from gatekeeper interviews and informal conversations with education professionals on the topic of social media revealed opinions that were not as extreme as the parents perceived (e.g. “social media is all or nothing”). Some professionals appeared to view social media the same way as participants did: as a mixture of benefits and risks that needed to be managed on a case-by-case basis. However, they nonetheless appeared to subscribe to the view that children might be too dependent on social media:

**LOGAN:** Yeah, I think, um... Yeah, I do think so, I think that parents do have to exercise a responsibility, um, and there is just more options these days with social media. I know... of one parent who ordered their son to remove something from Facebook I think because it was inappropriate or, you know, just just just not suitable, so yeah, I think the community have a responsibility, um, you know, there’s always been rebels and they post stuff that you would never post yourself (quiet)

- Excerpt, gatekeeper interview.

The gatekeeper in the above quote was not alone in his views. The data gathered from other such interviews – which included people who led their own activity groups, teachers, librarians, church leaders, community centre staff and trustees – were very much structured around the theme of social media as a mixed blessing. While education professionals shared the view that children should have the best experiences online, they also felt they were in a position where they could not afford to dedicate a lot of time to nuanced discussions around children’s cybersecurity. The main takeaway was that education professionals did not have enough time, they did not have enough resources, that external speakers were hard to find, and cybersecurity events were too hard to organise.

In other words, while education professionals wanted to support students and their parents in a nuanced discussion about the Internet, a lack of resources and time was one of the major challenges in addressing social media in a meaningful way. This was apparent when the discussion with the researcher turned toward the subject of cyberbullying, which one teacher said in an informal conversation was a big problem for their school. None of the gatekeepers the researcher spoke to seemed aware of cybersecurity resources such as the NSPCC’s “Share Aware” (2017) which had resources for schools, or seemed aware of provisions in the Government’s advisory note (2017) that stated that education professionals can investigate instances of bullying that happen off school grounds, or that they can confiscate mobile phones. The latter point is relevant since education professionals stated in conversations with the researcher they had no ability to intervene, and thus the responsibility for managing cyberbullying fell to the parents.

If there was one theme that could sum up all the family group interviews, it would be “individual anxiety”: about social media technologies, what their children did on them, and how little adults could do to change that:

**LUCINDA** (mother): so that’s something that makes me feel... quite anxious, it’s obviously what she can find, on social media, as she gets older, and then obviously, a long way into the future, but it’ll go very quickly, is how she deals with her peers, on social media, and the whole Facebook bullying thing, because even though obviously it’s not an issue now, I know for instance for colleges is-

is a massive issue, cause I work for... college, education, as part of the university, and it is a huge safeguarding issue, and that is something that now, I'm kind of like, anxious about and want to manage her social media usage, and teach her about it from quite a young age, really.

- Excerpt, Hope family interview

While “anxiety and insecurity become an integral part of the modern condition” (Wilkinson, 2001:4, cited in Mythen, 2014b) there is something to be said about anxiety as a psychological phenomenon and the extent to which it is justified or not. The child in question, Cressida, was 4 years old at the time of the interview and had just started school. Older children, like Joao, Christopher, Robin, Paul, and Ioan were not using social media a lot, but their parents expressed concern about what would happen when they went to secondary school and made their own accounts on “adult” social media sites. What this quote encapsulates most is the sense that all parents interviewed for this thesis expressed – that their children were growing up online and there was very little they felt like they could do to support them. In this case, the parental “anxiety” is both a response to the uncertainty experienced toward social media and the lack of trust they have in what will happen in the future – which in turn relates to Luhmann’s view that “to show trust is to anticipate the future” (Luhmann, 1981).

One aspect of that anxiety was seen in how parents encouraged their children to spend time outside, as a means of encouraging them to have a social life that was not social media-based. Joe’s parents, for instance, pushed back against his saying that it was more dangerous outside than it used to be several years ago, and asked what made him think that. Chanda’s parents, likewise, stated that they encouraged her to spend time outside, and that they were happy whenever she suggested doing something with her friends that was outside of the house. Manon did not push back against her daughter’s statement that her friend lived very far away, but also encouraged her children to take part in multiple outdoor activities. There was not one parent among all that were interviewed that did not state, in one way or another, that they encouraged their children to spend as little time as possible online.

However, despite efforts to encourage spending time offline, many parents perceived their children as spending a lot of time online and set out to control that, with younger ones being

monitored more often and older ones receiving more autonomy. The start to secondary school was when the parents gave the child their first mobile phone and helped them set up social media accounts, although, as chapter four has demonstrated, some parents felt like it was too early (Paul, for example). Many parents talked about their children being online in terms of losing control, feeling exposed, or feeling left behind:

**JOSEPHINE:** but I hope that these guys (the children) that we can learn stuff together although they'll be miles ahead of me [...]

\*

**MARIA:** I-I think for us, (the aspect of social media we are not so comfortable with), it's keeping the personal and the f-family erm to ourselves

\*

**MARISSA:** And it's always, it's always accessible, which means that, for instance when we go on car journeys we have rules about that as well, so if it's a short journey you're not allowed your device, but if it's a long journey you are, and I dunno... you've just got to... manage it all the time so.

- Excerpts, various interviews

The above quotes show a common theme for the parents' testimonies from the interview, the using of informal conversations and rules to manage the parental anxiety about social media technologies as much as the children's usage of social media. While the children were conceptualised as the primary beneficiaries of these rules, the implication from a lot of the interviews was that the parents were also concerned about the privacy of the family as a whole, and that, once certain information was made available online, it would be more difficult to control what happened afterward.

The specific aspects of social media that parents were anxious about varied from family to family. In some cases, it was how invasive social media was. Indeed, Maria recalled telling her older children not to post about their brother online when he was still a baby: "you do whatever you want on Facebook, you post your photographs, but I don't want anything, any photographs of

your brother on Facebook, I don't want erm, any comments about your brother, on Facebook, and mostly I think they have respected that, mostly." (Maria, quoted from interview.)

In other families, it was advertiser impact and materialism that was seen as a pervasive concern. Several examples were already quoted in Chapter Four, but in yet another set of families, the main concern was how social media twisted an individual's self-perception. One example is from the Gordon family:

**ADERYN** (mother): okay, I'm not comfortable with the whole Instagram with famous people using it and just like putting their most beautiful self on and I think that increases the pressure on people to [...] well, older people... erm, I'm not comfortable with the **oversharing**.

- Excerpt, Gordon family interview.

It is also worth noting that, while parents and children reported hearing a lot of scary stories from schools, they also reported on how schools themselves sometimes perpetuated the problem, by assigning more work to be done online, thus encouraging children to stay on the computer for longer.

**CASSIOPEA** (child, 12): And also I do find it slightly annoying because, if you're not in a position to use a computer, like, you were just doing some homework in school on a computer, you couldn't get your phone out to just... check your homework

[...]

**MARISSA** (mother): yeah, and now homework has, so it's difficult to manage that because (pause) quite often, time to time, Cassiopea would have her device, her social device time, and then she would go do her homework, and for me, that (pause) would have been better if she could just... come away from a device to do that, but no, something else she had to get information from, had to have access from, and device is just kind of, it's not... even if you're not... you parent in a way that means you're trying to um, set boundaries it's really difficult

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

As seen from the quote, both mother and child expressed concerns about the time spent on the device and how it would be used. There was also an implied tension between the messaging received from the school with regards to the Internet and social media, and what the teachers encouraged children to do. From that family's perspective, the issue was not just that social media usage was widespread among their individual social circles, but also that the school was creating a situation where the child was on a device at all times. This they perceived as increasing their risk, which in turn increased uncertainty for the parents.

Despite the anxieties associated with this, however, parents demonstrated reciprocal trust both in their contributions to the discussion, and their behaviours. While some of this can be attributed to the researcher's presence, a lot of the discussions that occurred in interview appeared to be a continuation from previous family conversations about social media.

As stated in this chapter, the atmosphere during the conversations was respectful and patient, regardless of whether the children were engaged in the discussion or distracted by other things. Voices were almost never raised, and if they were, it was always in a more joking manner, such as when a child seemed to engage with a catfish in the game and the mother stepped in to say that this was "obviously a no!" It's worth pointing out that even children who tried to take over the discussion or became distracted seemed to listen to their parents, and the parents were very patient and focused on their children's answers. When a child made a statement that the parent was interested in, the question that was followed up with was always respectful, allowing the child space to express themselves.

There was no mention in the interview of difficult negotiations, setting of contracts ("family agreements") about social media (as suggested by the NSPCC's "Share Aware" campaign, 2017), no threats about telephones being taken away, or children being banned from interacting with their friends on social media because of a fear that they would behave inappropriately. In all the interviews, there was a sense that the parents would rather trust their children to behave well online than to deny them access on the grounds of being "too young". Indeed, the one case the researcher encountered where a child had to be banned online occurred during the first stage of the fieldwork – and the parent relaying the story explained that the ban

had happened after the child had repeatedly broken their previous promises about behaving well on social media.

What this sub-section demonstrates is that, beyond being a good space to set rules, family conversations are a good space for children to discuss their feelings around social media and to contribute to family practices. Indeed, the interview itself often became a space where family practices could be reinforced or renegotiated. By telling the researcher what they thought could be done to prevent cyberbullying, Thérèse and Deborah were also demonstrating to their parent that they knew what was appropriate and what was not in their own “spaces”; they were also demonstrating that they could be trusted online.

The main finding of this sub-section is about the variety of risk-reduction practices parents engage in and the extent to which those practices are hidden. The advisory notes for parents seem to be about overt methods of risk-reduction – explicit rules, “online contracts”, and mobile phone bans at the table (NSPCC, 2015; Griffiths, 2019). However, the ways in which the parents in this cohort protected their children online was more focused on subtle ways of ensuring safety – more nuanced conversations about what makes one comfortable online, altering search histories, and encouraging face-to-face socialising with friends.

The other main finding, closely entwined with hidden gatekeeping, is the anxiety that appears to underline most of the adults’ decisions about their children’s engagement with social media technologies. As seen in risk society, anxiety and insecurity are accepted as regular parts of modern life (Wilkinson, 2001:4, cited in Mythen, 2014b). However, there is nonetheless a gap in the literature that pertains to that parental anxiety and the desire to have a trust-based approach to digital parenting. As seen from the data, the parents of the cohort did not want to implement a more authoritarian approach to digital parenting (Valcke et al., 2010b) but felt like they did not receive sufficient support. Furthermore, the parents appeared to place a high premium on their children having a degree of personal autonomy on social media, despite that this was one of their identified causes of anxiety. The next section will therefore look at how the parents and children reconcile their different practices, and what the rationale is for seeking out a more trust-based practice toward social media technologies.

#### **4. The role of trust in the family practices**

The previous sections mentioned trust in relation to children's and parents' risk-reduction practices on social media in several different ways: the lack of trust children had toward schools, the trust children had toward their parents, the lack of confidence and trust parents had in social media technologies themselves, and the anxiety (characterised by lack of trust) that parents had for their children's future on social media, despite everyone's best efforts. The risk-reduction practices by children and parents were examined separately for the sake of understanding the two participant groups better, before moving onto discussions of generosity, confidence, self-efficacy, and mutual respect. But in order to discuss the role which trust plays in family practices, it is necessary to return to the topic of systems trust versus trust in individuals.

The first subsection will therefore look at systems trust and how social media is perceived as a vehicle of popular opinion. It will explain how the families interviewed conceptualise social media itself as altering individual behaviours, before moving onto a discussion of how the family practices balance trust with personal autonomy, privacy, and agency.

##### **4.1 Social media as a vehicle of popular opinion**

Despite differentiating between systems trust and interpersonal trust, Luhmann specified that both were necessary for the functioning of society and for individuals to exist within that society (Luhmann, 1981). However, when examining the data, it is striking to see that the participants – both adults and children, as seen from chapter three – did not trust the social media platforms and thought that the negative aspects to social media always outnumbered the positive ones. This, in turn, made the environment untrustworthy, despite what the individual and family risk-reduction practices were. As such, interrogating why social media is not trusted by the families, despite the extensive efforts to control the systems which have been described in this chapter.

So far in this thesis, the main concerns from parents pertained to the interpersonal relationships between family members, peers, friends, and other trusted cohorts. However, one concern that has not been touched upon is how social media can be a vehicle for change and popular opinion, and how some parents perceive that as damaging. For example, when asked about aspects of social media they were not comfortable with, Isabella and Adam, the parents in one of

the groups, laid out in detail what they perceived of as the proliferation of lies and untruths on social media:

**ISABELLA** (mother): And I think another side to social media is the campaign side of it. So obviously, there are plus sides to the campaign side of it, that with money raising things, I think for a lot of people, they feel that this is a strong argument, the social media, the person is somebody who's been involved in fundraising for most my working life. So pre and post social media, I would say, I think it's done more harm than good. A, we're awash with campaigns. And the other thing is, is that a lot of their campaigns are based on very ill-founded facts. So it can end up the people invest a lot of time and energy and emotion and money sometimes into something that really they know very little about.

**ADAM** (father): Also campaign providers is by just giving the same profit massively from all these. So the whole thing is just a vicious circle.

- Excerpt, Frank family interview

The risk of encountering misleading statements in media, it can be argued, is not exclusive to social media alone. However, Isabella and Adam's statements stand out because they go beyond a criticism of the technology and the platform – they look at how lying is normalised and they perceive that as a precursor to worse things to come. When asked to describe an example of an online campaign that people knew “very little about”, the parents talked about two cases that had been presented in the media: one was about Charlie Gard, a sick boy whose parents contested the decision of his medical team to take him off life support (Garrison, 2017). The other case was about the release of John Worboys, a convicted sex offender, released early from prison despite the particulars of his case (Shaw, 2018). The parents both expressed the view that these cases were more complicated than they seemed, and that the public response to that had been exacerbated to an inappropriate degree by social media.

**ADAM** (father): But umm the medical professionals all said that this child, there was no point in continuing care for this child, because he wasn't actually ever going to recover. Right? It was actually, they considered it to be cruel, to continue to keep them on life support. The parents disagreed. And then they had

a massive campaign and people on social media backing them up, including Donald Trump,

**ISABELLA** (mother): Well, they wanted him to have more treatment and care. And they were saying that the treatment was actually causing more pain and more --

**ADAM**: Yeah, exactly. So all but at times... But I think what's interesting is that they used to be a time in life. When medical professionals or other professionals, there was consensus on something. And actually we shouldn't have this point with... the one I was going to raise was with this fellow Worboys who was just released, I think the other day... he, they've gone through all the processes, the parole board and all the rest of it. These are professionals, they know what they're doing. They know the case, they know very well. And we shouldn't have this. We have almost trial if you live by social media. Yeah, try and influence these decisions section. That that's a really bad side that message immediate use, because all these people who join these kind of things, they have no idea. They just get carried away.

- Excerpt, Frank family interview

What the parents are concerned about is not that it is easier to spread misinformation on social media, but that the misinformation alters people's behaviours and undermines the authority of professionals and experts. It ties in with Beck's risk society theory to an extent in that it demonstrates how respect of institutions is eroded by individualisation (Mythen, 2004b). However, looking at the examples brought up by the Frank family, it can be argued that the real threat to the authority of institutions is the increased scrutiny that social media brings to controversial decisions and systemic failures. Charlie Gard's case was one where "emotive fact" (quote, Frank family interview) had a major role to play in the public outrage (Garrison, 2017). Indeed, that was one of many similar cases about a person's right to die and right of dignity that was happening at the time (Davies, 2018). However, John Worboys' case was later the catalyst for many resignations and process reforms, after it was later revealed that there were other systemic problems that the case was a symptom of (Smith, 2019).

The Franks base their assertion that social media is damaging and untrustworthy on the assumption that the traditional systems (medical authority, judicial authority) are flawless and should not be tampered with. Later in the interview, Isabella states that “this is the judiciary system so that they're basing their decisions on the facts and on psychology reports and all these other things” and Adam adds that it was “dangerous” that the politicians had then stepped in to review the evidence after the public outcry: “I think that that's really that's quite frightening thing that you could have masses of morons joining a campaign to influence decisions” (quote, Frank family interview).

This brings us back to Luhmann’s view of systems trust and individual trust (Luhmann, 1981). The family view social media as untrustworthy because they conceptualise it as a vehicle of popular opinion, and they juxtapose the popular opinion as being in opposition to the traditional systems upon which society is built. So the lack of trust in social media technologies goes beyond concern about cyberbullying and identity impersonation – as seen from the Frank family interview, the lack of trust is based on a fear that social media normalises rebellion against traditional systems of authority. The concerns are that social media is not a safe system for children to use, no matter how intelligent or risk-aware the children are.

However, as stated in “Trust and Power”: “One has to learn to put up with different interpretations of the world, linking one’s own behaviour nevertheless to the selections of others. Trust then becomes, so to say, privatized, psychologized and thereby individual-tolerant; or else its function is narrowed down to certain types of communication in which the other person is demonstrably competent.” (Luhmann, 1981:54) So, the question becomes, how do the individuals negotiate all this added complexity and threat on social media?

#### **4.2 Trust, generosity, privacy, and autonomy**

If there is such powerful distrust in social media systems on the part of parents, and such anxiety about who one interacts with online on both sides, how do families continue to use the technologies to begin with? The previous chapters explored the different factors that drive people to social media – pleasure, usefulness, peer pressure – but they do not tell the full story. After all, participants do have choices on the matter of whether they stay on social media or not., and they have power to say no, even if the consequences of that decision are not ones they would find pleasant. “Power must [...] be distinguished from coercion (Zwang) to do something concrete and

specified. The possible choices of the person being coerced are reduced to zero.” (Luhmann, 1981: 122) What this subsection will do is look at how families manage mistrust in systems (social media) through the trade-offs between trust with generosity, privacy, and autonomy.

First, the subject of trust and generosity needs to be examined. In terms of inter- and between-group dynamics, the researcher made no observations about whether children of different genders were treated differently by their parents. It was also not clear whether having siblings of the same or different gender changed the digital family practices. Every child was viewed individually, as a person with their own preferences, character, and abilities. There was tension noticed, for example, in families where some siblings were perceived as more “daring” or “naughty” than others.

**JOSEPHINE** (mother): I feel like I have, no, but it’s not you, I feel like I should be the one kind of making those choices, but with you (talking to Angela) I feel like I haven’t had to do that, I don’t have to worry about what you’re doing online, but with M3 I’m going to have to do that more because she’s more

**PAMELA** (child, 11): what am I more

**ANGELA** (child, 13): She’s also a lot more vulnerable, cause you’re a young girl.

**JOSEPHINE**: also, you’re kind of slightly more daring.

**ANGELA**: Yes.

**PAMELA**: Basically

**JOSEPHINE**: Basically it’s because you’re more daring

**ANGELA**: Basically it’s because you’re naughtier and you’re more willing to lie

- Excerpt, Marigold family interview

What is notable about this excerpt is that despite her concern Josephine expected having to have the same approaches to risk and trust with all three of her children, in that she would have to

be as lenient with Pamela as she was with Angela, despite her concerns. She was not alone in this either - parents expressed that they were more concerned about one child or the other, reacting more to the comments of those children around risk online, or listing reasons why certain children were not allowed on social media sooner. In some groups, when the conversation turned to rules about usage of the Internet, there were some children that made a point of saying that they did not want to be on social media anyway, that they did not see the point in it. Although it was not explored in great detail, there was a sense in some of the participating families that the parents felt like they had to be more permissive with their rules around social media than they would have liked in the interest of fairness – and that some of their children were responding to that anxiety by stating that they did not want to be online in the first place.

What this demonstrates, when compared to the findings of the previous subsection, is the extent to which the parents in this cohort were willing to be generous with their trust toward their children. Despite lacking confidence in social media technologies, they let their children engage with them. This goes beyond simply allowing social media because of the child pestering them – it demonstrates family trust and goodwill as having a crucial part to play in the practices. The ways in which generosity and trust contribute to the parents’ decisions to give their children autonomy online suggests more than just “warmth” (Valcke et al., 2010b). Generosity and trust suggest a willingness to suspend fear (Luhmann, 1981). There is, however, an aspect of fairness at play as well, as seen from the families’ testimonials. The extent to which a desire for fairness informs the family’s practices is a topic that will have to be explored in further research.

One might argue that a degree of trust and fairness is necessary to maintain family harmony, in groups with multiple siblings. However, given the high level of mistrust displayed toward social media systems, that explanation for the testimonies does not appear satisfactory. This is where the second trade-off, between trust and privacy, comes into play.

The rules of using Internet-connected devices in the home demonstrated one of the ways in which parents managed their anxiety and lack of trust in social media systems – younger children were not given their own devices in some families, they could only use the devices in the common rooms, and the parents would review all usage history. Those rules were explored, but what was not discussed in more depth was the fact that all these rules involved the child relinquishing some of their privacy in order to alleviate their parents’ concerns.

It might be expected that children would object to such an invasion of privacy, but the interviews suggested that was not the case. In some cases, not only did the children know their parents could track their phones and reviewed their device usage history, but were willing to give up even more of their privacy for the sake of being safe:

**CASSIOPEA:** I also think that phones should have an alarm button, because... say like I was getting kidnapped, and they... took my phone away from me, we could, I know this is extreme, but

**MARISSA** (mother): (laughs)

**CASSIOPEA:** if I had my phone, but, and they hadn't taken it from me, but I still had my phone, I would have no way of texting my mum or... calling her, because if I spoke they'd know I was calling somebody

**RESEARCHER:** mhm

**CASSIOPEA:** but I think it should have a little alarm bell that's got a message, like, I'm in trouble, and then

**ANDROMEDA:** yeah but, what if you accidentally press

**CASSIOPEA:** and they can call the police and then at least you know that somebody...

**RESEARCHER:** hmmm

**MARISSA:** I think that's not... that's

**CASSIOPEA:** it would be a little bit more helpful, wouldn't it?

- Excerpt, Rose family interview

Combined with some of the other ways in which children kept themselves safe online, the giving up of some privacy can be interpreted as a necessary trade-off. It can also be seen as a means of earning their parent's trust – by demonstrating a willingness to give up some privacy, they are demonstrating that there is nothing wrong. With older children, who had more autonomy

on social media, this was not so much the case. However, with younger ones, giving up some privacy and offering their Internet usage up for examination, was a way for them to demonstrate maturity and trustworthiness online.

The trade-offs between trust and privacy were not just symbolic transactions, however. The interview cohort also offered examples of when children had sought out their parents' advice when something online had made them uncomfortable, as seen from previous chapters in this thesis. What this show about the trade-off between privacy and trust for these families is that rules must be obeyed, and that there needs to be appropriate follow-up to those rules. If a child is made uncomfortable online, they are meant to ask for advice and share the experience with their parent. Therefore, that highlights the fact that family practices are not static – there is a fluidity on just how flexible the parents can be, depending on how their children respond to rules and how much trust is being violated. This is in contrast to the literature on digital parenting which tends to present it more as a series of fixed categories determined solely on parental traits like levels of involvement and warmth (Valcke et al., 2010b). What the data shows in this sub-section is that the children's behaviours and characters matter as well, and that trust based on track record matters the longer the child is online.

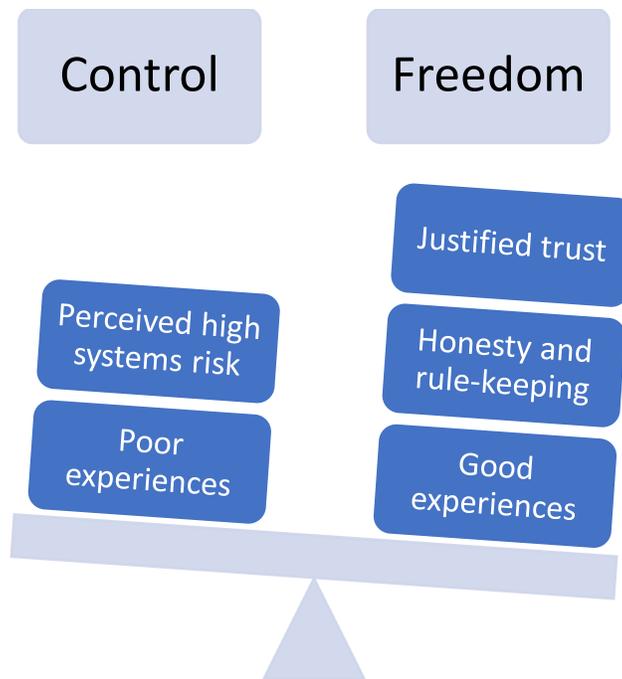
This is where the final relationship – between trust and autonomy – needs to be discussed. In the context of the interviews it became clear that the parents' strong preference was to respect their children's right to explore the Internet on their own terms, and to develop a social life in an age-appropriate way. This is one of the reasons why a lot of the gatekeeping activities of adults tended to be more subtle and covert, rather than expressed in explicit rules.

As seen from previous sections, a lot of families were concerned about exposure to social media being done in an age-appropriate way. This can be seen in the different rules imposed on younger children, and it can also be seen in some of those children's conceptualisations of different platforms being “for children” and “for adults”. It has already been stated that there are no differences in the functionality of one platform (like Facebook for example) that makes it more or less age-appropriate than other (such as musical.ly). But both adults and children made a distinction and it can be argued that it has something to do with how the families conceptualise autonomy. The principle of “you will be given freedom online when you are older” reinforces the idea to the child that social media is an “adult” domain and as such limits the child's risk of being

exposed to age-inappropriate content. However, this approach works when the children respect their parents' rules and trust their judgement. This once again highlights a gap in the literature on family practices, as the absence of children's voices and relationships with their parents leaves a theoretical blind spot for researchers.

Although the trade-offs between trust and generosity, privacy, and autonomy have been examined separately, they are very much connected in the interviews. Familial interactions and history inform confidence about the future, which is in line with Luhmann's conceptualisations of familial trust (Luhmann, 1981) but the exact ways in which those interactions work vary from family to family, and individual to individual. For parents, managing risk on social media, despite their lack of systems trust, is seen as a balance of understanding their children's characters, evidence of past behaviour, adherence to rules, and applying fair rules among siblings. For children, managing that same risk in the face of their parents' anxiety (and their own anxiety) requires a lot of self-gatekeeping and self-censure, but also giving up an appropriate degree of privacy and demonstrating desirable behaviour in order to build trust. The family practices are richer and more fluid as a result, but also more resistant to classification.

The literature is vague on what family practices on social media should be like – this is a gap that this thesis aims to fill. There is a lot of prescriptive information given to parents through government notes, schools, and cybersecurity campaigns, but research seems to indicate that the reality is more nuanced than that (Valcke et al., 2010a; Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig, 2012). Family practices are fluid (Morgan, 1996; Bauman, 2000) but also context-dependent and individual. Illustrating the role which trust has in the data, Figure Seventeen illustrates how for the participating families, it might make the difference between a control-based model of digital parenting and a more permissive, individual-driven approach.



*Figure 17: Illustrating the relationship between trust, freedom, and control-based digital parenting methods.*

For many of the parents interviewed for this thesis, one of the biggest dilemmas expressed was how much freedom they ought to give to their children and how to balance that out with reasonable rules and expectations. Systems risk and poor personal experiences, as illustrated in Figure Seventeen, tended to make the parent more inclined toward control-based digital parenting, while honestly, rule-keeping, and good experiences tended to give them more confidence in giving their children more autonomy. Trust, ultimately, was what “tipped the scales” towards more freedom in the approach, although it is worth noting that the trust always had to be earned in the families – it was not given by default, but demonstrated over time, with practices being constantly re-evaluated.

Overall, the main findings of this section have been that despite the low systems trust in the families, the ways in which they managed risk was based not on any rigid set of rules, but on trust. The ways in which trust was granted and kept, however, were multiple and fluid, and as such, it resists classification and prediction. Despite trust being a way to reduce complexity (Luhmann, 1981) its own role in family practices and risk reduction on social media is complicated.

## 5. Discussion

This chapter has explored risk-reduction practices by parents and children, and the role trust plays in those practices. It started by examining the risk-reduction practices of children: self-gatekeeping and independence. The chapter then looked at the parents' hidden gatekeeping practices and common anxieties about social media technologies. Finally, it interrogated how adults and children reconcile their individual practices, the impact of systems distrust that parents had toward social media, and the ways in which interpersonal, familial trust was developed through relationships with autonomy, generosity and privacy.

The findings build on those from the rest of the thesis by providing an additional dimension to the research question "What are the key factors influencing social media practices within the family?" Chapter Three demonstrated how generation itself is not as important. Chapter Four showed that participants found social media useful and got enjoyment from it. Chapter Five focused on some of the negative forces driving usage, such as peer pressure and internal threats. This chapter, therefore, looked at the role of trust, because participants have power and agency. Despite their reservations about social media, participants continued to use it. As such, understanding how their practices help them manage the complexity of their feelings toward risk on social media is crucial.

Literature around children's cybersecurity (HMIC, 2015b, 2015a) and around cyberbullying (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Law et al., 2012) does not concern itself very much with the details of the children's usage social media unless they pertain to a particular risky behaviour (like talking to strangers, or online aggression). What the chapter has done is highlight some of the less visible, but nonetheless important ways in which children self-gatekeep. It has also highlighted some of the anxieties underlying that self-censorship and self-gatekeeping. As much as the adults disclosed concern about social media technologies, children were as anxious about being able to have a safe online life – something which they appeared to think was threatened if their parents perceived them as having a less-than-ideal response to risk at every turn. On the one hand, that inspired the children interviewed for this project to put a lot of thought into their own self-care online. On the other, it created tension with the amount of disclosure that children did provide their parents with.

For their part, parents appeared motivated by their own anxieties and desire to support their children to keep their gatekeeping activities hidden. The focus for parents appeared to be on providing their children with practical advice and influencing their behaviour in more subtle ways, while also using the tools at their disposal to manage as best they could their children's online behaviour. They were motivated by two main factors: the perceived lack of support from schools and other official channels, and the systems distrust they showed toward social media. The latter was motivated by a complex set of issues, including, but not limited to, the view that social media is undermining traditional authority systems. While some techno-neutral writings paint social media as a tool and nothing more (Baym, 2017; boyd, 2014) the cohort interviewed for this thesis perceived it as more sinister than that. Whether the change brought on by social media is for the better or not was not the main concern for the participants – it was the type of mentality that social media encouraged, and the ways in which it influenced official structures in ways that bypass traditional checks and balances.

All these factors matter because the family practices toward managing risk on social media are based on trust. Risk society presents individualisation as a negative force that drives risk production (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004b) but the family practices in this cohort of participants seem motivated, in part, by a desire to respect the individual's right to experience social media and to make their own virtual social life. Trust allows that to happen – but it has a delicate relationship that is informed by generosity, history, rule adherence, and trade-offs with privacy. Family practices and digital parenting are fluid and determined not just by the parents' own inclinations (Valcke et al., 2010b) but also by the children's behaviours and relationships. They are not fixed and they are not constant, resisting classification, but they appear motivated by a desire to experience the Internet in age-appropriate ways. This desire does seem in conflict with the perception of social media as a force for risk, but nonetheless the willingness of participants to engage with it (as opposed to opting out of it) demonstrates a willingness to use trust to manage that complexity, for the time being. It appears that, more than any other factor explored in that thesis, it is trust that helps the participants with tolerating risk. The next section will summarise those findings and outline the ways in which this thesis has answered its main questions.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **1. Introduction**

The focus of this thesis has been the role of perceptions of risk and trust in family practices around social media technologies. Its aims were to explore the ways in which perceptions of risk and trust impact upon the usage of social media technologies in the family, and to examine in detail the factors that influence said perceptions. While the scholarship around social media is growing (Ivan and Hebblethwaite, 2016; Lifshitz et al., 2016; Barbosa Neves et al, 2016; Stephen Katz, 2016) and there is more nuance being added to our understanding of children's usage of ICTs (Bányai et al., 2017; boyd, 2014; Turel & Bechara, 2016) children's voices are still largely absent from the discussion. The objective of this thesis was to add to that growing scholarship and add dimension, both to the forces that bring families to social media, and the forces that make them nervous.

This chapter will summarise the findings. It will begin with an overview of the key findings from the four preceding empirical chapters, highlighting the theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis. The chapter will also discuss some of the limitations and methodological contributions of this thesis, and end with an outline of some potential future research opportunities.

### **2. Key Findings**

Given the literature around intergenerational perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies, this thesis aimed to answer the following research questions: Within the context of families living in the United Kingdom, to what extent can we detect differential perceptions of risk and trust in social media usage amongst different generations of family members? And, if generational divisions among family members are not detected, what are the other key factors influencing social media practices within the family? This section will summarise the key findings from the empirical chapters, starting with the different generational perspectives on risk and trust in social media technologies, before moving onto the other factors that were identified in the course of this study: pleasure and usefulness, peer pressure and insider threats, and the role of trust in family practices. The section will end with a short discussion on the ways in which Beck's risk

society theory (Beck and Ritter, 1992) was helpful and unhelpful as a lens through which to view the data.

## **2.1 Generational perceptions on risk and trust in social media technologies**

At the start of this research project, the researcher held two main assumptions: that there would be a significant difference in how family members perceived risk and trust in social media technologies, and that this difference would be determined by the generation to which family members belonged. These assumptions were based on both the theoretical literature available at the time (Lam, 2010; Mainsah, Brandtzæg and Følstad, 2016; Davies, 2017; Brandtzæg, Petter Bae; Chaparro Domínguez, 2018) and the guidance documentation released by the Department of Education and online safety campaigners (HMIC, 2015b; Morgan & Department for Education, 2015; NSPCC, 2015).

However, the findings from the interview cohort for this thesis suggest that is not the case. Both in terms of perceptions toward social media platforms, and perceptions toward social media users, the different groups of participants displayed similar views on risk and trust. Furthermore, the data from the game which participants played as part of the research confirms these findings – suggesting that the attitudes are similar, and that participants recognised and responded to risky situations in a similar manner. Indeed, the children interviewed as part of this project seemed less tolerant to perceived risk in the game than their parents did.

Examining the results from Chapter Three, it is interesting how often children blocked a scenario, instead of “allowing with caution”. The children’s deliberations whether to allow an interaction demonstrated far more awareness of risk than the literature implied. Children’s choices in the game also revealed that they needed reasons for people to be in their social circle. By contrast, their parents appeared to give potential connections the benefit of the doubt a lot more.

The results of the first empirical chapter raise many questions, chief among them why the divide in perceptions toward risk and trust was presumed to be generational in the first place. There were differences in the attitudes of individual participants - however, they were not determined by age. The chapter examined some additional data from recent studies, like those predicting a future uptake in ICT usage among older people (Deloitte, 2017, 2019) and proposed an alternative explanation that what is being witnessed is a version the Technology Adoption Lifetime Curve (Moore, 1991) in action.

Early exposure to ICTs and social media has some influence on how children perceive risk and trust toward those systems, but as implied by boyd, those influences are not the same across the entirety of the generation (boyd, 2014). Far more likely is that those differences of perception are informed by a combination of external variables and personal attitudes, as seen in the Technology Adoption Lifetime Curve (Moore, 1991). Social media platforms like Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006) have grown in usage and popularity in what seems like a short time, but it is easy to forget that there are still parts of the developed world where Internet connection is not even guaranteed, which exacerbates disenfranchisement (Malecki, 2003; Warren, 2007; Ofcom, 2018). This adds a further social dimension to the findings of this thesis – while the children interviewed here were from well-off households, they are very much of the group that adopted social media technologies early on. In another cohort, it is possible that a further generational element might emerge. However, in this study, the evidence does not support the view of a generational divide in perceptions.

## **2.2 Other factors influencing family practices**

Following the findings of the first empirical chapter comes the question of other factors influencing the family's usage of social media technologies. There were many suggested by the literature, but the ones observed in the data were examined in chapters Four through Six: the spectrum of perceived usefulness and pleasure in encouraging usage, the role of peer pressure and insider threats in moderating usage, and the role of trust in the individual and family practices to both encourage and moderate usage. These factors, though examined separately, were connected to each other and interdependent, each having a separate contribution to both theory and practice.

### **2.2.1 The perceived usefulness and pleasure of social media**

The second of the empirical chapters focuses on perceived usefulness of social media and the perceived pleasure that participants derived from social media, which were identified on as two of the main driving forces behind the participants being on social media.

On the surface, the families interviewed conceptualised social media as being useful to them in a day to day perspective – to connect with relatives, to support them in learning things, to facilitate their social lives, to facilitate virtual co-presence with friends. They used social media for a variety of purposes and, depending on their needs, they found it varying degrees of helpful or distracting. The degree to which a participant found social media helpful or distracting depended

on their individual circumstances, although among the adults, there was a professional usefulness element to social media presence that was unique to them because of their circumstances. Self-employed parents seemed to view social media as more of a distraction than help, although they, too, acknowledged that it was an aid to them in a professional capacity. Traditionally employed parents, for their part, seemed to more inclined to view social media in a more neutral way, as far as their own usage went.

However, it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between cases where participants found social media more useful or more pleasant, leading the researcher to the conclusion that the two factors were conceptually connected, at least for the interview cohort. Although participants used the language of “usefulness” to talk about their feelings and experiences of social media technologies, they also talked about having fun and deriving pleasure from their usage. This is relevant for both children and parents because pleasure as a concept is rarely talked about, both in practice-based literature and in theory. Research describes some children’s usage of ICTs as addiction-like (Whitty and Joinson, 2008; Turel and Serenko, 2012) yet viewing social media as an experience that can be pleasant is not a topic of discussion.

Yet, the findings suggest that pleasure is an important factor that drives usage. Children viewed social media as a key aspect of their social lives, and another way in which they could interact with their peers. Even in cases where children stated in the interview that they did not find social media itself that useful, they pointed out that being able to talk to their friends was an important reason for them to engage with the technology.

Further, there were participants in the cohort who did say they found social media enjoyable for its own sake, as a source of entertainment and news. There were those who pointed out that social media was being used as means to distribute falsehoods and unhappiness, but there were also those who enjoyed social media content and were genuine fans of the creators. If anything, the interviews demonstrate the variety of opinions that can be had about social media as a communications medium, even in a small group of people. It is another one of the reasons why the chapter refers to the perceived usefulness and perceived pleasure as a spectrum rather than as fixed categories. Understanding the importance of perceived usefulness and pleasure, and the ways in which the two are connected, is relevant to the project because it fills a gap in the theory on why families use social media to begin with. Children are conceptualised as voiceless (Turel and

Serenko, 2012; Dong and Potenza, 2014) but what the findings show is that their views are crucial to understanding perceptions of risk and trust. The omission means that the picture is never complete, and thus any contributions to practice would be incomplete.

### **2.2.2 The role of peer pressure and insider threats in shaping usage of social media technologies**

The third empirical chapter focused on insider threats, as revealed in the data from the game. There were three main themes that were explored – peer pressure to be on social media, threats introduced by friends, and threats introduced by authority figures. However, despite that connection, peer pressure and insider threats did not have an inhibiting effect on usage. The data showed them playing a part in moderating the participants’ usage, but it did not stop participants from being on social media, which is a pertinent point in the last empirical chapter.

As for being on social media in the first place, most participants remarked that there was an element of peer pressure for the younger children. For the children who were more reluctant users, their friends were always pointed out as main motivators for the decision to go and to stay on social media. Peer pressure was also seen as a contributing factor by some of the adults – to the point where certain parents felt like they had no choice but to be on social media.

This is interesting in light of insider threats and how willing the participants were to enforce boundaries with different members of their social circles. Where parents and children had no problems enforcing boundaries in the game in a scenario with a “stranger” in it, risky behaviour from friends-of-friends or authority figures was tolerated for much longer. Even if the final outcome was a block in the game, the interactions went on for longer and the individuals thus put themselves at further risk.

What that chapter demonstrated was how levels of familiarity, or functional trust (Sargeant and Seligman, 1999; Braddock and Morrison, 2018) played a part in risk assessment. In it, group cohesion became a factor in the participants’ choices to stay safe online. Children found ways to enforce boundaries with friends and known bullies, but when the simulated interaction had them talking to a casual acquaintance, an authority figure or a trusted adult, they hesitated. Adults, too, struggled if the scenario called for them to block or to argue with someone who presented themselves as a trusted individual, or a family member. The assumption was that allowances had to be made in some cases, and some bad behaviour could be tolerated – but one of the challenges

of the game was that the participants never knew if it was a genuine connection or an identity impersonator.

What these findings demonstrate is that, as far as this cohort of participants goes, the appearance of familiarity was enough to cause doubt. It did not matter so much if the person was who they said they were, so long as the participants thought they were vetted (as a friend-of-a-friend) or were in a position of authority and trust (like a teacher or a parents of a friend). Such scenarios caused confusion to children, and did not result in immediate enforcement of boundary because the participants worried of what the consequences of that action might be.

The practical implications of those findings are significant for the literature that concerns itself with cyberbullying, grooming, and radicalization. Bystanders are often described as the true people with power in a bullying situation (Gini et al., 2008; Catanzaro, 2011) but there is another side to that coin, and it is that the victims of bullying might be discouraged from seeking help. This discouragement could come – as this chapter has shown – from the fact that the bully is a member of the same social group, or indeed was once a friend. Victims might view seeking help as disrupting the social cohesion of the group – something which might result in their further exclusion and victimisation. As the findings from this thesis show, social exclusion was a powerful concern for the participants.

On a similar note, it is easy to see the practical application of these findings in efforts to combat online grooming and radicalization. The theory shows that the longer an interaction continues the higher the risk is (Whittle et al., 2013b; Williams, Elliott and Beech, 2013) and that messages from authority figures carry more weight in any situation (Braddock and Morrison, 2018) – what the findings have demonstrated is that a level of familiarity, or perceived familiarity increase the chances of an interaction continuing for longer. Applying those findings to safety notes for schools and parents could lead to improvement for children’s and teenagers’ health outcomes.

On a theoretical level, too, the findings fill a gap in the literature regarding risk society. The findings of the third empirical chapter put into question the tenet of risk society that a stronger community reduces risk production (Beck and Ritter, 1992; Mythen, 2004b). It was the threats from inside the community that were more challenging to the participants, not the ones from outside it. On an individual level, risk society does not account for the complexity of a community

of friends and family. While on a macro level it can help shed light on environmental topics and social change, when turned on a single person's social circle, the theory does not account for the fact that risk can be produced internally as well as externally. This, in turn, leads to the final chapter, which is about what participants did in their individual and family practices to reduce the risk of using social media technologies.

### **2.2.3 The role of trust in shaping individual and family practices toward social media technologies**

Despite the findings of the other empirical chapters, the question of why participants did not opt out of using social media is not resolved. Peer pressure and perceived pleasure from using social media account for some of the usage, but not all. In light of some of the more negative views participants held toward social media technologies, it seems logical to ask why they would not opt out of the experience altogether.

The answer could lie in the risk reduction practices, both on the individual and family levels, that the participants engaged in. Despite the lack of literature on the topic, the findings showed that children engaged in a lot of self-gatekeeping practices, managing their own social media environment and who they engaged with. This self-gatekeeping was not the entirety of the family risk-reduction practices either – parents often engaged in a variety of hidden gatekeeping as well – but it is relevant because it demonstrates that children are aware of the potential risks and are working on their end to keep themselves safe.

There are four main aspects that characterise the family's risk reduction practices: the relationship between trust, autonomy, privacy, and generosity. The families engaged in a complicated set of trade-offs between the last three in order to build trust and navigate complexity. However, that complexity is often missing from theory – digital parenting practices have been discussed in terms of warmth and levels of involvement (Valcke et al., 2010b) but not in terms of trust or how fluid that trust could be. The families in the interview cohort placed a high value on trust, but that trust was built upon experience, knowledge, and familiarity. There were trade-offs – of privacy on the part of the children, of control on the part of the parents – but they were deemed as necessary because the parents wanted their children to experience the Internet on their own terms. Trust, therefore, played a crucial role in mediating those relationships and reducing

complexity, which is noteworthy because in risk society, there is very little room for it. The next section will discuss that in more detail.

### **3. Contributions to theory**

Further to the findings to this thesis, and their implications for practice, there several contributions to theory that are worth reiterating. Some of those contributions were mentioned already in the summary of the findings, but will be discussed more in depth in this section, starting with how the risk society model fits into the social media context, how technology adoption for families might best be illustrated, the issues with insider threats in the family context, and what methodological insights have been drawn from the project.

#### **3.1 The risk society model in the social media context**

Although this thesis attempted to use Beck's risk society (1992) as a lens through which to view the data, it was not sufficient to explain some of the findings. The discussion on peer pressure and insider threats raises questions about one of the main tenets of risk society – the idea that increased individualisation is a driver for risk production. That view may hold true on a macro level, but on the individual level, it is not sufficiently precise.

The reasons why risk society did not serve as a useful lens in this case was the assumption that a community automatically reduces risk. Such an intent does not exist in the definition of the concept - “a group of people living in a particular locality or who have a certain shared interest, who engage in systematic interactions with one another” (Giddens & Sutton, 2014:117). A community might reduce an environmental risk through cumulative actions, but individual risks remain for individuals to solve.

That is not to say that there are not ways in which risk society is useful to better understand family practices on social media. The systems mistrust expressed by participants toward social media in the final empirical chapter can be interpreted as an example of risk society in action. Because social media facilitates misinformation and takes advantage of emotive topics, it undermines traditional authority systems (medical expertise, the integrity of the justice system) and thus reproduces risk. Similar examples were used by Mythen in his examination of risk society (Mythen, 2014). However, it is worth talking here about some of the wider assumptions of the

participants in this study, and through that, to interrogate some of the assumptions of risk society itself.

Despite the mistrust of some participants toward social media technologies, others expressed how useful these same technologies were for gathering information and keeping up with new developments. Some of the children interviewed expressed how glad they were that social media allowed them to learn about people who were not like them, and disagreed with what they perceived as unfair censorship of social media (as seen from Angela's assertion that LGBTQ+ content creators did not deserve to have their videos blocked). The participants acknowledged that social media could be used to spread misinformation, and that it could sometimes be used for the purposes of enacting checks and balances.

The question for theory then becomes – at what point does social media stop being useful as a tool for transparency, and becomes dangerous? Is it when the risk produced impacts a large group of people? Or is it when authority itself is challenged? Some of the examples brought up by participants were genuine cases of social media creating threats to the wellbeing of large groups of people, but other examples resulted in positive change, which would not have happened if systemic failures had not been called into question through the medium.

From the point of view of the participants, there was not one answer, which could stem from the difficulty of applying risk society – a macro theory – in the individual context. But there is a larger question that is brought up by the data, and it is whether authority (or the appearance of authority) is a sign of absolute correctness. The participants conceptualised the authority of medics and the judicial system as something that must be beyond reproach; but it is worth remembering that both medicine and the judicial systems are not set in stone. As fields, they have evolved over time to include new information and to correct wrongs. It is easy to paint social media technologies as a force that produces threats, but the data points to the conclusion that they are producers of change – a concept that includes risk and opportunity.

One might argue that there is a distinction to be made between risk and threat (Lupton, 1999) but it is not one the participants made, and that is relevant. Risk was conceptualised always as a destructive force, because to take a risk would be to challenge the status quo. What is often left out in the discussions of risk society, however, is that the status quo is beneficial to some – not all. The participants in this research project are a small, homogenous sample of relatively well-off

people: they do not represent the views of someone more disenfranchised. They are, statistically speaking, less likely to suffer from medical malpractice, or face unfair treatment by the judicial system.

The question posed here is not whether all authority should be challenged all the time, or whether social media should be used as a way to drive change. The question is whether risk society as a framework works on the individual level, and the data shows that it does not. Not because the theory itself is wrong but because it does not concern itself with systemic inequalities that might impact different groups of people in different ways. Beck himself states that risk society is when the risks created are so big, they become everybody's problem (1992). What this project has demonstrated is that social media, and the risks it produces, are still, very much, dependent on the individual using it.

### **3.2 The technology adoption model for families**

What the empirical chapters have demonstrated is that social media adoption by families with children is a complex process. Less to do with generationalism, the process is a combination of trust in users and systems, which in turn is influenced by experiences, personality, education, family, and the social circle. Age did play some part, but for a set period of time, and in relation to the rules imposed within the family.

Prior to the commencement of writeup for this project, the researcher anticipated that Davies' Technology Adoption Model (1989) would provide a useful framework through which to view the data. Over the course of analysis and writeup, however, the researcher discovered that the model did not necessarily reflect the multi-stage decision-making process of families when it came to social media technologies. Indeed, all models that the researcher examined were lacking in one key area, which was the reflection of the intersecting factors and influences that led to a family engaging with and using social media.

The model demonstrated in Figure Eighteen represents the researcher's view of how the various themes from their project interacted with each other within family practices to inform social media usage. The model follows some of the findings from the empirical chapters in order to better illustrate how social media was adopted by the family members. While not a replacement for the existing models, it is an adaptation that is particularly pertinent to families:

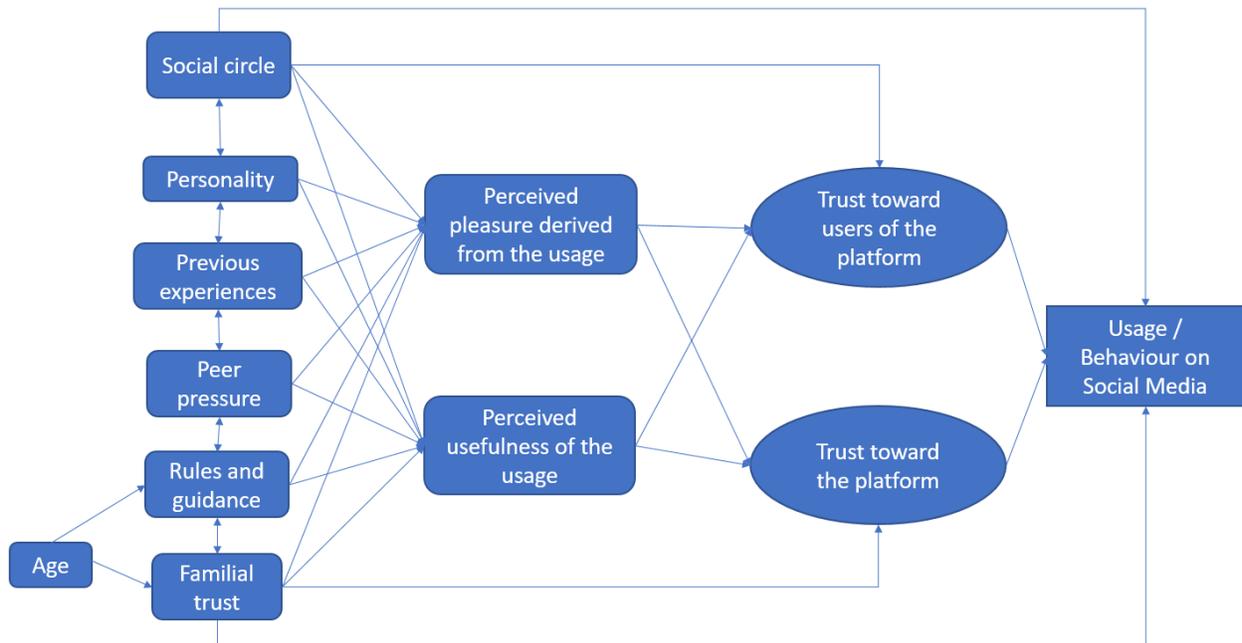


Figure 18: Technology adoption model for families

As seen from Chapter 3, age is an influencing factor in some regards – for example, the age of a child informed the level of trust the family placed upon them, and the sorts of rules they had to adhere to when it came to screen time and social media. However, age was not by far the decisive factor, or indeed, the biggest one.

Familial trust, rules, peer pressure, previous experience, personality, and the overall attitude of the child’s social circle towards online privacy were all factors identified in the empirical chapters as having some impact on social media usage and behaviours. These factors were not the same for every family, and had different importance to each individual, but were all mentioned in some way or another as having an influence on attitudes toward social media. The model in Figure Eighteen illustrates that, by showing not only their influence on perceived pleasure and perceived usefulness of social media (as seen in Chapter 4), but also on each other.

The model then goes on to illustrate how all factors influenced the perceived pleasure and usefulness that individuals and families derived from social media. These two factors, and the spectrum on which each family existed between those two factors, were explored at length in Chapter 4, but what is also key is that they informed the levels of trust families and individuals had towards the social media platforms, and the social media users.

Finally, the model demonstrates how that trust informs usage and behaviour on social media. Here, it is important to reiterate the difference between systems trust (which pertains to the platforms and how they are run) and users' trust (which pertains to the individuals with whom family members interact with online.) By creating this distinction, the model adds to the dimension of the analysis and provides additional frames of reference that can be applied to a dataset, be it from this project or in another family practices one.

What is especially relevant about the proposed model is that it does not depend on one element – if trust toward the platform is removed, for example, it does not mean that usage of social media stops. Similarly, the perceived pleasure derived from social media usage does not depend just on peer pressure or personality, but on multiple different factors. Such a formulation is truer to the data and closer in demonstrating the fluidity of the family practices than a more straightforward model.

Understanding the complexity of technology adoption in the family fills significant gaps in the theory on cyberbullying as well (Whitty, 2002; Erdur-Baker, 2010; O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011), on grooming (Whittle et al., 2013b; Williams, Elliott and Beech, 2013), on security online (Kandias et al., 2010). Most importantly, it allows more space for the children’s perspectives. This is crucial because theory has a tendency to treat children as unreliable witnesses to their own life experience. What is overlooked – and what this thesis helps to redress – is that regardless of what opinions they hold, or how logical they can be, children are responsible for their own actions, and they are the driving force in their lives. As such, their viewpoints need to be acknowledged and respected, if academia is to produce a theory that reflects their experience.

It is also crucial to acknowledge the complexity of family life in technology adoption theory as well for adults. Parents may be perceived as the gatekeepers of the home (Ribbens McCarthy, 2008) but they also engage in a variety of trade-offs between trust and control as part of their family lives. Rather than setting the tone for their children’s online interactions (Valcke et al., 2010b) the data showed parents as trying to balance out the principle of fairness with what they believed was right for each individual child and their development. Understanding the desire to allow a child to self-actualise is important because it shines light on the parental dilemmas that families might face. Risk society may treat individualisation as a risk producer (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Mythen, 2004) but the data demonstrates that individualisation and independence are

qualities that parents seek to encourage in their children, while also cultivating an intra-familial dialogue.

For the families interviewed, it was trust that enabled them to protect against threats – not control. But as the empirical chapters show, trust is a difficult currency to build up and even more difficult to hold onto. That explains why it is so elusive to theorise in the context of risk and the family, but it does not make it any less crucial in light of insider threats.

### **3.3 Insider threats**

Insider threats as a term are more focused in organisational contexts than individual ones; nonetheless, the ways in which insider threats proliferate (Creese et al., 2012) has some crossover potential as the data demonstrated. In fact, the way insider threats proliferate in the context of the families' usage of social media technologies has interesting contributions to social capital theory.

To understand how insider threats proliferate, it is important to remember that the participants placed a high premium on social cohesion and building up their own social capital. To pursue and build that capital, participants engaged in social media technologies regardless of whether or not they themselves found the technologies enjoyable. The usage of social media was essential, but the responsibility for maintaining one's safety, relationships, and group cohesion fell on the individual. For children, the fear of loneliness and the perception of authority were two forces that facilitated the proliferation of insider threats. What that creates is a situation where the pursuit of social capital produces insider threats. The cost/benefit analysis between the social capital and the threats that come from social media usage is unclear – but it appears to depend on the individual.

At the beginning of this thesis, the researcher assumed that the way risk society theory would manifest in the data would be through a lens of physical dissolution of communities, and the need to counter-balance that with the usage of digital technologies, with the intergenerational conflict arising from children and parents disagreeing on the importance placed on virtual relationships over ones with people “in real life”. What the data has shown, however, is far more complex:

Fear of loneliness was the underlying factor of all the interviews, the undercurrent behind every theme that participants brought up: from the parental anxieties about strangers online, to the

children’s assertion that social media is “cheaper” to use than any other means of getting in touch; to parents expressing frustration with outdated Internet safety advice, to children insisting that their friends are all online and they only connect with friends. Fear of loneliness, of social exclusion, is the best way to sum up the responses received over the course of the fieldwork. It is the explanation for why some children would continue interactions with friends and family after they become rude or abusive online (even if it is only a game) – because the consequences of a severed relationship can have a ripple effect on the whole social circle. This is how the family practices created an environment where insider threats were effectively allowed to proliferate.

Establishing Identity	Establishing other connections	Establishing reasons for contacting	Insider Threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a family member?</li> <li>• Is this a friend?</li> <li>• Is this another parent or teacher?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are they friends with my other friends?</li> <li>• How many friends of mine do they know?</li> <li>• Are they an “appropriate” connection?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do they have a legitimate reason to talk to me?</li> <li>• Do I enjoy talking to them?</li> <li>• Would my family/friends object if I turn down the connection?</li> </ul>	

Figure 16: Perpetration of insider threats in the family context

Despite meeting the tests of identity, mutual connections, and reasons for contact, threats introduced by friends, authority figures, and trusted adults are still threats. The connections are nominally viewed as desirable because they could increase the individual’s social capital or help prevent loneliness; it was not until there was a clear, explicit threat, that the participants enforced a boundary by blocking or limiting the interaction.

The proliferation of insider threats is further exacerbated by the current online safety practices being encouraged by schools and policy. The over-emphasis on stranger danger leads to individuals focusing all their attention on determining whether the person is who they say they are, rather than what the consequences of the interaction might be. The empirical chapters have shown that there is a lot to be said and discussed on risk and trust on social media that have little to do with the current social discourse.

### **3.4 Methodological insights**

In addition to the empirical findings of this thesis, there are some methodological insights that are worth remarking on, regarding the family group interview and how theoretical validity can be better achieved in situations where the social desirability bias is expected to have a strong influence on participants. Much has been made in literature surrounding family group interviews about how children's voices are being silenced by the presence of their parents, and how the researchers themselves are creating an environment that is hostile to true knowledge being shared and co-created. Indeed, it can be argued that the criticism surrounding the family group interview far outnumbers any practical advice about the conducting of such interviews, and how researchers might empower their participants to speak their own truth.

Through the conducting of this research project, both through the actual interviews, and the reflection of their own field notes, the researcher came to the following conclusions about the methods of family group research:

First, it is doubtful that an academic study featuring family group interviews can be conducted with the researcher maintaining an unbiased position. Not because she might be tempted to "take sides" but because it is impossible to gain access to a family without earning the trust of individual members first. This research would not have been possible had the participating families not placed their trust in the researcher, both in the actual interview, and in the analysis, and such relationships are rarely built overnight. Further, it can be argued that the researcher herself placed a tremendous amount of trust in the participating families: not just in the information they shared with her, but also in physically allowing her into their space. As stated in the methodology chapter, the researcher conducted the interviews in the family home, sometimes meeting the participants for the first time on the day of the interview – thus putting herself in a lot of risk despite the seemingly low stakes of the interview.

Second, the role of play cannot be understated. In establishing methodological validity, play took the interview from the realm of the serious and the structured, to the playful and subversive. The scenarios left room for interpretation, allowing participants the freedom to play them out however they wanted, and it gave the children an opportunity to showcase their own creativity and intelligence in an unstructured way.

Another key to the success of the game was the absence of overt violent or sexual scenarios. This decision ensures that the game was age-appropriate, took the pressure off participants, and reduced the chances of psychologically taxing situations. This in turn opened the interview more to the idea of sharing knowledge through play.

While not every academic study can be comfortable to participants, it is important to understand the level of trust invested in a family researcher, and to respect that as much as possible. In situations where a rapport needs to be built over a short period of time, it is important to ensure that participants are comfortable sharing their experiences, and happy to have those experiences written about and analysed. While ethical approval at universities is often focused on risk management and minimising the possibility for legal action, trust in academia is also a factor that needs to be considered and maintained as much as possible.

The third methodological contribution of this thesis lies with the recruitment process itself, and how families decide together whether to take part in a study or not. While there is much in literature about the risks associated with children's interviews, in that they cannot take part in a study without the parents' knowledge and consent, there is another side which is worth examining: that parents cannot force their children to participate. While it is not possible to know in advance about family relationships, it is also worth noting that just as parents would not let their children participate in a study if they were not happy with the questions, so it is true that children would not give their parents' permission to enlist them in a study which they do not like. Thus, there is a degree of self-selection that occurs with family group interviews before the researcher is allowed through the door, which creates more space for trust to develop.

To sum up the methodological contributions of this study are contributing to the existing literature surrounding family group interviews. It is both confirmation of what the published writers have found – that trust is important – but also an invitation for future practitioners to continue exploring the method.

#### **4. Limitations**

As stated in the methodology chapter, the findings of this thesis are constrained by the homogeneity of the sample. There were other limitations as well, which are inherent to qualitative

studies – social desirability bias and lack of discussion around the valuation of personal data. While that means it's hard to generalise from this cohort, the data is nonetheless valuable and can be used to underpin future research.

The question of valuation of personal data might be relevant. The Cambridge Analytica scandal (where millions of Facebook profiles were mined and exploited by a for-profit political influencing company, 2018) had not yet broken at the time the data was collected, so there was no opportunity to discuss what monetary label participants might put on their personal data, even though an early version of the game had a question that asked participants that very question. It would be worthwhile to see how families with small children learn and approach the fact that social media is not free after all, and that Western countries have to rethink the way they think about privacy and the value of personal data.

In terms of managing the social desirability bias– it is helpful to think of the responses given as what the participants felt was the most important or pertinent. In other words, participants shared what they felt comfortable with sharing. The researcher did her best to build rapport and to create an environment where the participants could trust her – given the constraints placed on the interview, that was indeed the best she could do in that situation.

In methodological literature, there is an assumption that one-to-one interviews are more honest because it is a more intimate setting; however, a counter-argument might be given that if a participant wanted to lie, the setting would not matter. A further counter-argument might be that in interviews involving children, it might be safer to have those interviews in the presence of parents. For this topic, it was necessary to have the family group interview, with the risks and methodological drawbacks that it brings. And while the data may not have contained the whole story, it is nonetheless the one that participants felt needed to be told at the time of the interview.

That point applies just as much for the data from the game. While it was the hope of the researcher that this addition to the family group interview would help children tell their stories freely, the risk persists that the answers were influenced by a desire to say what the researcher or parents were looking to hear. However, the children applied themselves energetically and with focus to the goals of the game. It is possible that they were telling select parts of their stories, but nonetheless those stories can help pave the way for future research, which is what the next section will focus on.

## **5. Future research opportunities**

This thesis has not been without its difficulties, but it has also suggested opportunities future research, which will be examined in this section.

First, the findings of this thesis lend themselves well to a future quantitative study, with more participants from a variety of backgrounds. Such a research project would allow to test some of the findings with regards to intergenerational perceptions of risk and trust, perceptions of threat, and insider threats. Furthermore, a larger quantitative research project would allow to better understand the roles gender and social class have on perceptions of risk and trust – while this interview cohort was a mixture of genders, there was not enough data to draw any significant conclusions about whether family practices changed depending on the genders of the children or not.

Second, there is not much research available on using games of the kind that was used in this research project in order to understand perceptions of risk and trust. Future research opportunities could pilot the game into bigger groups, develop it to include more scenarios, or design bigger studies where the results of the game are compared to the participants' practices. The researcher is already working on bring the game to schools and to stakeholder groups in order to co-create new practices to support families in creating their social media practices.

Another potential research opportunity lies in engaging teachers and parents into wider discussions about the role schools have in supporting families in learning about risk and trust on social media. Although the researcher was able to speak to some teachers in the course of this project, those discussions could not be included in any great length in the study and there were many questions left unexplored. As such, a more detailed and focused discussion on teachers and their role in supporting families online needs to occur.

Finally, a potential research opportunity lies in exploring more in depth the ways in which children might attempt to fit in with their friends online. While this research project used a family group interview, the format was not without its limitations as to what could be shared in the context of the project. Another research project, one that focuses on individual users, could yield more information not just on insider threats, but also social capital and how children's performance on

social media might impact their wellbeing. Some research has already been done on the topic, but most of the information made available on traditional media focuses on anecdote, not so much on a systemic empirical study. In short, there are a lot of opportunities for future research, both for the leader of this project and other academics interested in the topic.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, this thesis has shown, the generational gap is much smaller than intended within this cohort – indeed, any difference between generations might have been more easily explained by the technology adoption curve, with age being a red herring in what is still early-to-middle days of social media adoption. That is not to state that there were no other influences on usage that are related to generational issues. As regards social capital, the peer pressure to be online seems focused on younger people more than their parents; however, that is not to state that the parents interviewed in this thesis did not experience those same problems as social media became adopted more into their social circles, and became the default means of communication.

What has emerged from this thesis is that, while individual families might tailor their practices to push back against the implied need to be online, there is a wider structural and social pressure that makes it difficult for them to disengage from social media technologies that they do not enjoy or find useful. The data reveals a need for a shared responsibility and trust-based approach to online safety; one that is not just taught by separate families, but to their whole social circle. There is a lack of collective understanding of what is appropriate behaviour online, what should be tolerated and what should not be. The families' perceived risk to be everywhere on social media; but it was through mutual, earned trust, that they felt empowered to manage it. The data gathered in this project suggests some ways in which we can move toward more shared responsibility for online safety:

First, there is a need for pushback against the idea of social media as a “young person’s problem”. Until institutions view social media as a necessary part of the more mobile society (Sheller and Urry, 2006) the ways in which online safety is taught will remain limited and irrelevant to the actual lives of its users.

Second, any online safety discussion must come with a caveat about the understanding that all members of a community on social media share responsibility for its safety. That does not just mean the offline community - immediate and extended family, teachers, and friends - but also those who are online. Individual online safety practices may be effective to an extent, but they are reliant on the rest of the group not betraying each other's trust by introducing unsafe people and topics into online spaces that are presumed as safe. The importance of bystanders is already recognised in cyberbullying literature, but it needs to be expanded into other aspects of online risk.

Third, it is crucial to push back against the ways in which social media providers like Facebook, Twitter, and even Google (one of the largest providers of email accounts) side-step responsibility in managing their spaces and responding to user concerns. The ways in which such platforms have managed risk in the past have been reactionary, and very much in a way that penalises regular users more than those who do wrong. For participants it was very much a concern that the platforms they used did not have a consistent anti-bullying protocol, which impacted their overall enjoyment of it.

In sum, the data suggests a demand for a cultural shift away from the centrality of social media technologies. Far from saying that children should not spend so much time online, there is a need to help individuals maintain social capital without compromising on their boundaries. Such a cultural shift may not be possible in the short term, and indeed might not be embraced because of the ways in which social media technologies are embedded into daily life, but it may be something to aspire to, and it is something that participating families are trying to implement through their practices already.

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# **Appendix 1: Gatekeeper Interview Questions and Information Sheet**

## **Information Sheet for participants**

### **Intergenerational Perceptions of Risk and Trust in Social Media Technologies**

#### **Invitation to take part**

I would like to invite you to take part in a project exploring the perceptions of risk and trust and social media technologies in families, and how those perceptions impact the usage of social media technologies. Before you decide whether you would like to take part in the study, it is important to understand why it is being done and what it would involve.

Please read the following document in its entirety. If you have any questions, take the time to discuss it with others, or raise them with me. You will find all the relevant contact information on the final page.

#### **Why is this research being done?**

The advent of social media technologies and the wide spread of their usage around the world has occurred in a comparatively short amount of time. However, few questions have been asked about the way people negotiate different perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies, particularly within the family. There are those who argue that the increased usage of social media can contribute to isolation and the breakdown of communities, and that this would lead to increased risks. It is suggested, however, that this risk can be counteracted through trust and the building of strong communities.

This project would be an opportunity to discuss stories and experiences around social media usage, as well as share any views on the way families impact each other's usage, and each other's perceptions of risk and trust online. Your input as administrators and managers at the Cheylesmore Community Centre is invaluable as you have a unique perspective of the needs and practices of the families who are part of your organisation. It would be vastly helpful, therefore, to discuss what your thoughts are on the matters of risk and trust on social media technologies, and the biggest benefits and challenges that families face today.

Furthermore, because of the Centre's mission to promote strong community ties and creating spaces for different groups to meet and interact, you have a valuable perspective about the ways in which it can improve its services. Your contributions will therefore also be crucial in the future developments of the centre.

**All participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any point in the study.**

### **What does taking part involve?**

You will be invited to take part in a short one-to-one interview. You will be asked questions about the aims and objectives of your group, its impact on the families involved in it, as well as your thoughts on social media, risk, and trust in family life. You will also be asked to reflect on what you think the biggest challenges to families are regarding social media, and what are the benefits that families might draw from it. Finally, you will be asked to consider what the role of the centre is, how it is beneficial to your organisation, and how it might improve its services in the future.

The interview will take no more than 30 minutes of your time, and will be recorded on a dictaphone. Transcripts will be anonymised and all original data will be kept in a password-protected folder. You will have the option to view the transcript and write-up once it is complete, and request any changes, if you wish to expound on a point you made, or withdraw.

### **What are the benefits of taking part?**

A big part of the research carried out around risk and trust online focuses on software and neglects the users' experience, or who they turn to when there is a setback. Without your contribution, it would be very difficult to understand how families use social media and how they negotiate the balance of risk and trust that is required to take part in the online world, and the role of non-internet-based organisations and activities to help manage that risk. This project is also an opportunity for you to share your knowledge in a confidential environment, consider the role of your organisation in promoting safe social media usage among families, and the future of social media in your spaces.

### **What will happen to the information?**

The interview will be recorded on a Dictaphone, transcribed, and then analysed using NVivo software. The information will be anonymised on transcription. Digital files will be stored in a password-protected folder. No paper copies will be made of the raw information. No-one but myself and my supervisors will have access to the data, and no personal information will be included in any write-up.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of the study will be written up as part of my PhD thesis and parts of it might be published in academic journals and books. The results would also be used in funding applications for the Cheylesmore Community Centre and to further improve its services. Those results will include some quotations from the interviews. Those quotations will be anonymised.

### **Will my records be kept confidential?**

Keeping your answers and the information you give confidential is incredibly important. Your answers will thus be anonymised to the extent that no personal data will be released, and it will not be possible to identify you if a snippet is included in an article or a write-up of the study. I will not share anything you say with anyone. However, if criminal activity is detected, I am obliged to disclose such information to the appropriate bodies. This process is put in place to

protect you and others, and for academics to live up to our obligations as responsible researchers. All records will also be kept confidential in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

**Will I get paid to take part in the study?**

No.

**Will my taking part have an effect on my job?**

No.

**What happens if I suffer any harm?**

I do not foresee you becoming exposed to any harm over the course of this project. However, if you do feel uncomfortable at any point, or after the fact, you are free to end the interview, and withdraw your participation.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

These interviews have been self-certified through the process at Royal Holloway University of London.

**Who do I contact if I have any further questions, comments, or want to withdraw from the study?**

For questions and comments about the study, or requests to withdraw, please contact me at my university email address [katya.bozukova@live.rhul.ac.uk](mailto:katya.bozukova@live.rhul.ac.uk)

If you have comments, questions and concerns that you do not want to share with me, please contact my supervisors:

Prof. David Denney [d.denney@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:d.denney@rhul.ac.uk)

Prof. Lizzie Coles-Kemp [lizzie.coles-kemp@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:lizzie.coles-kemp@rhul.ac.uk)

Dr. Rikke Jensen [rikke.jensen@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:rikke.jensen@rhul.ac.uk)

## **Question guide: Cheylesmore Community Centre**

1. To start with, can you tell me a little bit about your group – aims, objectives, people involved?
2. In your opinion, what are the top 3 things that your users benefit from?
3. What are the 3 things that your organisation/group would like to change in the next few years?
4. How do you think your group fits in with the centre?
5. In a blue skies scenario, how would you like the centre to be able to support you?
6. How do you think families in your group might use social media? In your opinion, what is the importance of social media for the people involved in your organisation?
7. Moving on to the topic of social media, I would like to invite you to consider, firstly, what aspects of social media are you most comfortable with? What aspects make you anxious?
8. On risk: What are the biggest risks that families have to deal with in the usage of social media, in your opinion? How do you think they cope with them? Do you think anything can be done to improve the experiences of families using social media? (In general but also in the context of your organisation/group/the centre)
9. On trust: Do you think there are benefits to families to using social media? What are they? Do you think that is the case for families in your organisation?
10. In terms of social media, risk and trust, do you think families involved with your organisation can benefit from anything in terms of courses, or support? Courses on digital safety, informal talks, open discussions, etc.)
11. Open question – any further comments?

# **Appendix 2: Family Group Interview Question Guide and Information Sheet**

## **Information Sheet for participants**

### **Family Perceptions of Risk and Trust in Social Media Technologies**

#### **Invitation to take part**

I would like to invite you and your family to take part in a project exploring the perceptions of risk and trust and social media technologies in families, and how those perceptions impact the usage of social media technologies. Before you and your family decide whether you would like to take part in the study, it is important to understand why it is being done and what it would involve.

Please read the following document in its entirety. If you have any questions, take the time to discuss it with others, or raise them with me. You will find all the relevant contact information on the final page.

#### **Why is this research being done?**

The advent of social media technologies and the wide spread of their usage around the world has occurred in a comparatively short amount of time. However, few questions have been asked about the way people negotiate different perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies, particularly within the family. This is what my PhD project is about.

This project would be an opportunity to discuss stories and experiences around social media usage, as well as share any views on the way families impact each other's usage, and each other's perceptions of risk and trust online.

**All participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any point in the study.**

#### **What does taking part involve?**

You and your family will be invited to take part in a group interview where you would be asked to reflect on your past and present social media usage. Questions would be asked about your first introduction to social media, how your usage has changed over time, the role it plays in your family and how you might like your social media participation to look like in the future. You will also be asked to take part in a game together where you will be asked to play out scenarios around social media usage. The interview will not take more than 60 minutes of your time, and will be recorded on a dictaphone. Additionally, as part of the interview, you will be asked to take part in a short creative activity as a team.

### **What are the benefits of taking part?**

A big part of the research carried out around risk and trust online focuses on software and neglects the users' experience. Without your contribution, it would be impossible to gather data to help understand how families use social media and how they negotiate the balance of risk and trust that is required to take part in the online world. This project is also an opportunity for you to share your stories in a safe, confidential environment, as well as to reflect on your present usage, and set goals for future usage.

### **What will happen to the information?**

The interview will be recorded on a dictaphone and then transcribed to be analysed using NVivo software. The information will be anonymised on transcription. Paperwork will be kept in a locked case while digital files will be stored in a password-protected folder. No-one but myself and my supervisors will have access to the full data, and no personal information will be included in any write-up.

### **Will my records be kept confidential?**

Keeping your answers and the information you give confidential is incredibly important. Your answers will thus be anonymised to the extent that no personal data will be released, and it will not be possible to identify you if a snippet is included in an article or a write-up of the study. I will not share anything you say with anyone. However, if criminal activity is detected, I am obliged to disclose such information to the appropriate bodies. This process is put in place to protect you and others, and for academics to live up to our obligations as responsible researchers. All records will also be kept confidential in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **Will I get paid to take part in the study?**

No.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of the study will be written up as part of my PhD thesis and parts of it might be published in academic journals and books.

### **Will my taking part have an effect on my job?**

No.

### **What happens if I suffer any harm?**

I do not foresee you becoming exposed to any harm over the course of this project. However, if you do feel uncomfortable at any point, or after the fact, you and your families are free to leave the study and withdraw your participation.

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed by the ethics committee at Royal Holloway University of London.

**Who do I contact if I have any further questions, comments, or want to withdraw from the study?**

For questions and comments about the study, or requests to withdraw, please contact me at my university email address [katya.bozukova.2015@live.rhul.ac.uk](mailto:katya.bozukova.2015@live.rhul.ac.uk)

If you have comments, questions and concerns that you do not want to share with me, please contact my supervisors:

Prof. David Denney [d.denney@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:d.denney@rhul.ac.uk)

Prof. Lizzie Coles-Kemp [lizzie.coles-kemp@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:lizzie.coles-kemp@rhul.ac.uk)

Dr. Rikke Jensen [rikke.jensen@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:rikke.jensen@rhul.ac.uk)

If any of the questions brought up over the course of this research project made you or another family member feel anxious or otherwise discomforted, please do take advantage of these resources:

Samaritans (anonymous support for people over 18 years of age)

Email: [jo@samaritans.com](mailto:jo@samaritans.com)

Telephone number: 116 123 (free number)

Childline (anonymous support for young people up to 19 years of age)

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Telephone: 0800 1111 (free number)

Cybersmile Foundation (resources and support for individuals navigating the online world)

<https://www.cybersmile.org/>

# Question Guide: Perceptions of risk and trust and social media technologies in families

General:

- Reiterating the aims of the project.
- Reiterating participants' right to disclose as much or as little as they want, and their right to withdraw.
- Making sure participants are happy to be recorded.
- Signing of consent forms.

Part One

Questions about the family's usage of social media:

- What does social media mean to you?
- What platforms / sites do you use, or used to use (including video games with chat functions)? How did you choose them?
- What electronic devices do you/did you use?
- What aspects of social media are you most comfortable with? What aspects do you enjoy?
- What aspects of social media are you anxious about? What makes you say that?

Part Two

**Before we begin, I want you to take a piece of paper and I want you to write down what you think is the worth of your personal information online. (Your name, age, your interests, and hobbies.) You can then put it in the envelope provided and put it aside.**

**Game: Fishing for catfish**

Catfish: a person who impersonates another person online to get closer to you, or steal your personal information.

The goal is to figure out which of these people can be trusted. Each of these cards describes a situation that might occur on a social media platform. Each person will read the ID and

background, and then, depending on what their designated goal is, they have to answer yes or no to questions posed by a family member of your choosing. (Demonstrate).

The other person has 3 questions to decide whether to block or go along with this person. They can also put the card to the family, which means others can give them advice but cannot ask questions themselves.

Among these cards, there are a few “catfish”. If you suspect the person is a catfish, you need to say so, and then block them.

When the player decides to block or go along, the first person reveals their goal.

Part 3 – debrief

How do you feel about social media after playing this game? What makes you say that?

Which parts did you find the easiest?

What about the hardest ones?

What sorts of questions would you have asked, if you had a do-over?

Why/why didn't you put more cards to the family?

Which, if any, of the cards reflected your own experience with social media?

If these situations really occurred online, what would you have done differently?

**Finally, I want you to look at the pieces of paper where you wrote down the value of your personal information online. I don't want you to share the number with me, I'm just curious – having played this game, would you change the number, and if yes, would it be higher or lower? What makes you say that?**

### Appendix 3: Game Scenarios

<p>ID: Schoolmate</p> <p>Background: We do not get along.</p> <p>Goal: Bullying you.</p>	<p>ID: Schoolmate</p> <p>Background: We know each other a bit, but not much.</p> <p>Goal: Getting to know you better.</p>	<p>ID: Friend of a friend</p> <p>Background: Met at someone's birthday. Got chatting about music.</p> <p>Goal: To make fun of you.</p>
<p>ID: Friend of a friend</p> <p>Background: Met at somebody's birthday. Got chatting about music.</p> <p>Goal: Talk more about music.</p>	<p>ID: Childhood friend.</p> <p>Background: Used to like each other a lot, but then you moved away. (Gives lots of details.)</p> <p>Goal: Catch up.</p>	<p>ID: Childhood friend.</p> <p>Background: Used to like each other a lot, but then you moved away. (Does not give many details)</p> <p>Goal: Catfish – the person is trying to steal personal data.</p>

<p>ID: Schoolmate.</p> <p>Background: We know each other but not well.</p> <p>Goal: I want help with my homework.</p>	<p>ID: Schoolmate.</p> <p>Background: We're good mates. (Gives lots of details, profile picture matches the person you know.)</p> <p>Goal: Keep on chatting.</p>	<p>ID: Friend of a friend.</p> <p>Background: Met up when you and your friend were out and about.</p> <p>Goal: Keep on chatting.</p>
<p>ID: Teacher.</p> <p>Background: Works in school and wants to make sure everyone gets their homework done.</p> <p>Goal: Catfish – teachers are not meant to contact you on social media.</p>	<p>ID: Parent of a schoolmate.</p> <p>Background: You wrote something unfair about their child online.</p> <p>Goal: Talk to you about it.</p>	<p>ID: Parent of a schoolmate.</p> <p>Background: You wrote something unfair about their child online.</p> <p>Goal: Say mean things about you in response.</p>

<p>ID: Schoolmate.</p> <p>Background: You usually get along but not so much these days. They said some mean things about you.</p> <p>Goal: Apologise.</p>	<p>ID: Parent of a friend.</p> <p>Background: You and your friend are good mates, but the parent's online photo is odd and they misspell your friend's name.</p> <p>Goal: Invite you to a surprise party for your friend.</p>	<p>ID: Parent of a friend.</p> <p>Background: You and your friend are good mates. The parent is organizing a surprise birthday party.</p> <p>Goal: Invite you to the party.</p>
<p>ID: Schoolmate.</p> <p>Background: You usually get along but not so much these days. They said some mean things about you.</p> <p>Goal: Carry on the argument online.</p>	<p>ID: Friend.</p> <p>Background: They haven't been speaking to you in a while.</p> <p>Goal: To catch up.</p>	<p>ID: Friend.</p> <p>Background: They haven't been speaking to you in a while. You feel upset and said something mean about them.</p> <p>Goal: To argue with you about it.</p>

<p>ID: Stranger.</p> <p>Background: Well-known TV personality, but not someone you know yourself. They don't use your name when they talk to you.</p> <p>Goal: Catfish. The person is after personal information.</p>	<p>ID: Stranger.</p> <p>Background: Well-known TV personality. You met them at a meet-and-greet and they promised to give you a follow.</p> <p>Goal: They're following up on their promise.</p>	<p>ID: Relative.</p> <p>Background: Used to be close with you but has fallen out with your parents over Christmas cards. Now they feel bad about it.</p> <p>Goal: They want to see if it's okay to talk to your parents again.</p>
<p>ID: Relative.</p> <p>Background: Used to be close with you but has fallen out with your parents over politics.</p> <p>Goal: They want to complain to you about it.</p>	<p>ID: Stranger.</p> <p>Background: You chat in video games. You chat about loads of common interests.</p> <p>Goal: They want to chat with you some more.</p>	<p>ID: Stranger.</p> <p>Background: You chat in video games. They seem oddly interested in your personal life, and not much in the game itself.</p> <p>Goal: Creep. They want to see pictures of you and your friends.</p>

<p>ID: Relative.</p> <p>Background: They get along with you and your parents.</p> <p>Goal: They want to stay in touch online.</p>	<p>ID: Relative.</p> <p>Background: They get along with you and your parents. However, they recently started selling health shakes online and they sell them very aggressively.</p> <p>Goal: To sell you stuff.</p>	<p>ID: Friend of the family, lives in another town.</p> <p>Background: They get along with you and your parents and promised to help you with your assignment for school.</p> <p>Goal: Following up on their promise.</p>
<p>ID: Friend of the family, lives in another town.</p> <p>Background: Gets along with you and your family. Their profile picture looks odd, though, and they send you a second friend request after you are already friends online.</p> <p>Goal: Catfish. They are after personal information.</p>	<p>ID: Friend of the family, lives in another town.</p> <p>Background: Gets along with everyone but has fallen out of touch.</p> <p>Goal: Wants to catch up.</p>	<p>ID: Friend of the family, lives in another town.</p> <p>Background: Gets long with everyone but has fallen out of touch. Turns out they found a new church and want to tell you all about it.</p> <p>Goal: Share their experiences – unfortunately, they’re not very good at listening to you.</p>

<p>ID: Fellow church member.</p> <p>Background: You know each other from Sunday service but you don't talk much.</p> <p>Goal: Get to know you better.</p>	<p>ID: Fellow church member.</p> <p>Background: You know each other from Sunday service but you already accepted a friend request from them and their new picture is wonky.</p> <p>Goal: Catfish.</p>	<p>ID: Fellow church member.</p> <p>Background: You know each other well and they promised to send you information about a summer retreat.</p> <p>Goal: Following up on the promise.</p>
<p>ID: Stranger.</p> <p>Background: No background, no apparent reason why they want to talk to you, don't answer any questions.</p> <p>Goal: Unclear.</p>	<p>ID: Stranger.</p> <p>Background: You've chatted on movie message boards and they want to carry on the conversation.</p> <p>Goal: They want to promote their new movie to you.</p>	<p>ID: Stranger.</p> <p>Background: You chatted in a Whatsapp group with your friends but you don't know them personally.</p> <p>Goal: Creep. They want to see pictures of your house.</p>

## Appendix 4: Taxonomy of Young Adult Books Featuring Social Media Technologies

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year of Publication</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Role of social media</b>	<b>Impact of social media to story</b>	<b>Space of risk?</b>	<b>Space of trust?</b>	<b>Neutral space?</b>
All about Mia	Lisa Williamson	2017	YA Contemporary	Some - Instagram and selfies are mentioned	Low	No	No	Yes
Contagion	Teri Terry	2017	YA Sci-fi	Blogs used	Low-Medium	No	Yes	No
Ice Cream for breakfast	Laura Jane Williams	2017	Non-fiction	Mentioned in passing	Low	No	No	Yes
One of us is lying	Karen McManus	2017	YA Contemporary	Murder mystery, bullying	High	Yes	No	No
Accidental Superstar	Marianne Levy	2016	YA/MG contemporary	YouTube used to propel mc into fame	High	Yes	Yes	No
Becoming	Laura Jane Williams	2016	Non-fiction	Mentioned in passing	Low	No	Yes	Yes
Book of Lies	Teri Terry	2016	YA fantasy	Some - mentioned in passing	Low	No	No	Yes
More of me	Kathryn Evans	2016	YA Sci-fi	Facebook and blogs used a lot by heroine to research medical condition and to	High	Yes	Yes	No

					connect with people; some of which very bad				
This Savage Song / Our Dark Duet	V. E. Schwab	2016	YA Horror / Fantasy	Social media used by students to check on each other/ stay in contact	Low	Yes	Yes	No	
Asking for it	Louise O'Neill	2015	YA Contemporary	Bullying and sex abuse	High	Yes	No	No	
Binge	Tyler Oakley	2015	YA non-fiction	Blogger memoir	High	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Hello Life	Marcus Butler	2015	YA non-fiction	Blogger memoir	High	Yes	Yes	Yes	
I Hate Myselfie	Shane Dawson	2015	YA non-fiction	Blogger memoir / short stories	High	Yes	Yes	Yes	
I, Justine	Justine Ezarik	2015	YA non-fiction	Blogger memoir	High	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Illuminae	Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff	2015	YA Sci-fi	Novel told in chat snippets, email snippets, and transcripts of surveillance cameras	High	Yes	Yes	No	

In Real Life	Joey Garceffa	2015	YA non-fiction	Blogger memoir	High	Yes	Yes	Yes
Life with a Sprinkle of Glitter	Louise Pentland	2015	YA non-fiction	Sort of used - blogger book	Medium-High	No	Yes	Yes
Love, Tanya	Tanya Burr	2015	YA non-fiction	Blogger memoir	Medium-High	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mind Games	Teri Terry	2015	YA Sci-fi	Matrix-like social media and virtual reality	High	Yes	Yes	No
Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda	Becky Albertalli	2015	YA Contemporary	Social media used to bully me but also for comms	High	Yes	Yes	No
The epic adventures of Lydia Bennet	Kate Rorick, Rachel Kiley	2015	YA fiction	Book based on popular YouTube show	High	Yes	Yes	No
Girl Online	Zoe Sugg / Siobham Curram	2014	YA Contemporary	Used loads; blogger book	High	Yes	Yes	No
Messenger of Fear	Michael Grant	2014	YA Horror / Fantasy	Social media used for bullying	Medium	Yes	No	No

Pointless Book	Alfie Deyes	2014	YA non-fiction	Blogger.... Thing	Medium	No	No	No
The secret diary of Lizzie Bennet	Bernie Su	2014	YA fiction	Book based on popular YouTube show	High	Yes	Yes	No
Fangirl	Rainbow Rowell	2013	YA Contemporary	Main character writes fanfic	High	Yes	Yes	No
Ink	Amanda Sun	2013	YA fantasy	Google	Low-Medium	No	No	Yes
More than this	Patrick Ness	2013	YA sci-fi	The whole world disappears into virtual reality to save resources	High	Yes	No	No
Quicksilver	R J Anderson	2013	YA Sci-fi	Used Some	Low-Medium	No	Yes	No
Adorkable	Sara Manning	2012	YA Contemporary	Main character uses her blog and other social media as business / Social media personality	High	Yes	Yes	No
Circle of silence	Carol M. Tanzman	2012	YA thriller / contemporary	About a highschool news crew	Medium-High	No	No	Yes

Close encounters of the girl kind	Andy Robb	2012	MG contemporary	Websites and Internet mentioned	Low	No	No	Yes
Dying to Know you	Aidan Chambers	2012	YA Contemporary	Email and IM	Low	Yes	Yes	No
Every Day	David Levithan	2012	YA magical realism	Email used some	Medium	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gone, gone, gone	Hannah Moskowitz	2012	YA Contemporary	Used some	Medium	Yes	Yes	No
Speechless	Hannah Harrington	2012	YA Contemporary	Blogs and internet used in passing	Low-Medium	Yes	Yes	No
The long Earth	Terry Pratchett and Steve Baxter	2012	Sci-Fi	The instructions for creating main plot device are distributed on the Internet; blogs used	Medium	Yes	Yes	Yes
All those things I've done	Gabrielle Zevin	2011	YA sci-fi	Mentioned in passing. The internet is restricted and paid for	Low	No	No	Yes
Bumped / Thumped	Megan McCafferty	2011	YA sci-fi	Huge. Social media celebrities etc.	High	Yes	Yes	No

The Fault in our Stars	John Green	2011	YA Contemporary	Mentioned in passing	Low-Medium	Yes	No	No
The Lunar Chronicles	Marissa Meyer	2011	YA Sci-fi	Social media and other technology used a lot - newscasting and information interception	Medium	No	Yes	No
Dear Dylan	Siobhan Curram	2010	YA Contemporary	Starts with a newsletter	High	Yes	Yes	No
Mercy	Rebecca Lim	2010	YA fantasy	Email used some	Low-Medium	No	Yes	No
Paranormalcy	Kirsten White	2010	YA fantasy	mentioned in passing	Low	No	No	Yes
The Ghost and the Goth	Stacy Kade	2010	YA fantasy	Blogs used	Low-Medium	Yes	No	No
Will Grayson Will Grayson	John Green	2010	YA Contemporary	Used a lot	Medium-High	Yes	No	No
Hush Hush	Becca Fitzpatrick	2009	YA fantasy	Google	Low-Medium	No	No	Yes
Shiver	Maggie Stiefvater	2009	YA fantasy	Google	Low-Medium	No	No	Yes

Wings	Aprilynne Pike	2009	YA fantasy	Google		Low-Medium	No	No	Yes
Wintergirls	Laurie Halse Anderson	2009	YA Contemporary	Pro-aorexia mentioned	websites	Medium-High	Yes	No	No
Paper Towns	John Green	2008	YA Contemporary	Mentioned in passing		Low-Medium	Yes	No	No
Twilight	Stephanie Meyer	2008	YA fantasy	Google		Low-Medium	No	No	Yes
Unwind	Neal Shusterman	2007	YA Sci-fi	Used in passing.		Medium	No	Yes	Yes
Mortal Engines books	Philip Reeve	2006	YA post-apocalyptic	Mentioned in passing as a relic from another time		Low	No	No	yes
The Boyfriend List + sequels	E. Lockhart	2006	YA Contemporary	Mentioned in passing		Medium	No	No	Yes
Exodus	Julie Bertagna	2003	YA Sci-fi	Used by main character and floating cities hedonists		Medium-High	No	Yes	No
Sloppy Firsts (+sequels)	Megan McCafferty	2001	YA Contemporary	Used at times,derided loads		Low-Medium	Yes	No	No
Ender's Game	Orson Scott Card	1994	YA Sci-fi	Blogs used to take over the world		Medium-High	Yes	Yes	No

## Appendix 5: Participant Nicknames

	Parent 1	Parent 2	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4
<b>Marigold family</b>	Josephine Mother, present for whole interview	NA	Alys 9 years old, present for some of the interview	Pamela 11 years old, present for whole interview	Angela 13 years old, present for the whole interview	Hanako 13 years old, friend*, present for whole interview
<b>Hope family</b>	Lucinda Mother, present for interview	Malcolm Father, present for whole interview	Cressida 4 years old going on 5, present for very little of interview	NA	NA	NA
<b>Lys family</b>	Manon Mother, present for interview	NA	Therese 12 years old, present for whole interview	Deborah 14 years old, present for whole interview	NA	NA
<b>Mehta family</b>	Akhila Mother, present for some of the interview	Suraj Father, present for whole interview	Vishnu, 3 years old, present for only little of the interview	Chanda 15 years old, present for whole interview	NA	NA
<b>Gordon family</b>	Aderyn Mother, present for interview	Liam Father, present for some of the interview	Gwallter 5 years old, present for very little of interview	Ioan 12 years old, present for whole interview	Gwen 14 years old, present for whole interview	NA

<b>Rose family</b>	Marissa Mother, present for interview	Paul Father, present for interview	Andromeda 9 years old, present for interview	Cassiopea 13 years old, present for interview	NA	NA
<b>Peres family</b>	Maria Mother, present for interview	NA	Joao 10 years old, present for interview	NA	NA	NA
<b>Newton family</b>	Marge Mother, present for interview	NA	Christopher 10 years old, present for interview	Jane 12 years old, present for interview	NA	NA
<b>Amarylis family</b>	Zara Mother, present for interview	NA	Robin 10 years old, present for interview	Michael 12 years old, present for interview	NA	NA
<b>Frank family</b>	Isabella Mother, present for interview	Adam Father, present for interview	George 14 years old, present for interview	Joe 12 years old, present for interview		
<b>Baker family</b>	Sarah Mother, present for interview	NA	Ratna 15 years old, present for interview	NA	NA	NA

## **Appendix 6: Copy of the Call for Participants**

### **Call for participants**

Do you feel that you and your kids are able to talk about social media?

Or does it seem like a whole new world to yours?

Whatever your experiences are with social media, I'd like to hear about them.

### **Intergenerational Perceptions of Risk and Trust in social media technologies**

Is a project that looks at how families with primary school aged children, or older, negotiate their social media practices. It aims to answer two main questions:

1. To what extent can we detect different perceptions of risk and trust among family members?
2. How does that difference in perception impact usage of social media?

### **Would you like to learn more? Would you like your family to participate?**

For more information about the project, and signing up, you can email me at:

katya.bozukova.2015@live.rhul.ac.uk

or

### **Join the conversation online**

Website: [riskandtrustonsocialmedia.wordpress.com](http://riskandtrustonsocialmedia.wordpress.com)

Facebook: Intergenerational Perceptions of Risk and Trust Online

Twitter: @RiskAndTrust201

## Appendix 7: Presentations of Findings

### Presentations:

Bozukova, K., 2020, Children and Social Media: A Workshop for Research and the Third Sector, *In: Lincolnshire Open Research and Innovation Centre*, Lincoln: LORIC, Available online, URL: <https://loric.thedata.place/dataset/children-and-social-media-workshop-reports-and-toolkit> [Accessed 10/05/2020]

Bozukova, K., 2019, The kids are (probably) alright, *In: TEDx Brayford Pool Women*, Lincoln: TEDx, Available online, URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_VafToEwkgY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VafToEwkgY) [Accessed 10/05/2020]

Bozukova, K., 2019, The Role Of The Generational Gap In Family Practices Toward Social Media, *In: Digital and Analogue Discourses*, Manchester: ESA 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Sociological Association, Available online, URL: <https://www.conftool.pro/esa2019/index.php?page=browseSessions&search=Bozukova> [Accessed 02/02/2020]

Bozukova, K., 2019, It's not just for kids: How The Cyber Security Practices at Home Carry on Into Our Work, *In: Lincolnshire Women Entrepreneurs' Brunch*, Lincoln: LORIC

Bozukova, K., 2019, Using games in doctoral research, *In: Royal Holloway Doctoral School's Annual Conference*, London: Royal Holloway University of London

Bozukova, K., 2018, The generational gap in technology usage is smaller than we think, *In: Royal Holloway Doctoral School's Annual Conference*, London: Royal Holloway University of London

Bozukova, K., 2017, Social media, to me, is like a garden, *In: Presentation to Cheylesmore Elderly Community Group*, Coventry: Cheylesmore Community Centre.

Bozukova, K., 2017, Young People's Rights Online: How can we make our approaches to cyber-security more inclusive, *In: Royal Holloway Leverhulme Conference*, London: Royal Holloway University of London

Bozukova, K., 2017 The art of the possible in researching family online practices and perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies, *In: Royal Holloway Doctoral School's Annual Conference*, London: Royal Holloway University of London

Bozukova, K., 2016, Inequalities of Technological access and their place in online studies, *In: Royal Holloway PGR Presentations*, London: Royal Holloway University of London

### Manuscripts Under Consideration:

Bozukova, K., 2020, Risk, Trust, and Children on Social Media: how modern outrage puts children at risk online, Monograph under consideration by Bristol University Press, Bristol: Bristol University Press

## Appendix 8: Ethics Review Form

### Ethics Review Details

You have chosen to submit your project to the REC for review.	
Name:	Bozukova, Katya (2015)
Email:	<a href="mailto:PCTL001@live.rhul.ac.uk">PCTL001@live.rhul.ac.uk</a>
Title of research project or grant:	Intergenerational Perceptions of Risk and Trust in Social Media Technologies
Project type:	Royal Holloway postgraduate research project/grant
Department:	Law
Academic supervisor:	David Denney
Email address of Academic Supervisor:	<a href="mailto:D.Denney@rhul.ac.uk">D.Denney@rhul.ac.uk</a>
Funding Body Category:	Other
Funding Body:	Leverhulme
Start date:	01/05/2017
End date:	31/07/2018

### Research question summary:

Within the context of families currently living in the United Kingdom, to what extent can we detect differential perceptions of risk and trust in the social media context among individual members?

What role do these differential perceptions of risk and trusts play in the way the family creates its practices surrounding the usage of social media technologies?

To what extent do family members influence each other's perceptions of risk and trust in social media technologies?

In what ways do perceptions of risk and trust impact the usage of the technology?

How do family members work together to approach risk and trust online?

### Research method summary:

This project will consist of semi-structured group interviews with families with children of primary school age. Each family will be interviewed as a group. Questions will focus on family members' usage of social media; how they started using it and how their usage has developed over time. The interview will also contain an activity where the participants would be asked to imagine the daily social media usage of a fictional family, and then evaluate these different activities using the colours green, yellow and red to mark the relative risk of each. Please see attached documents for a sample information sheet, and consent form.

Initially I will run a pilot study of 2 group interviews where I will test out my questions, the group setting and seek feedback. After the initial pilot stage, I will adjust my question guide in order to move onto the main project methodology, where I will conduct interviews with 10 to 30 families. As families are quite diverse it would not be possible to know for sure how many adults and children will be in each group. It is possible that a family might consist of a single parent and their child, or a couple with many children. For reasons of practicality I will try not to recruit families with more than three children as I would likely not be able to conduct the group interview within the appropriate time frame. I will not interview individual members on their own. All contact with children will be conducted in the presence of their guardians, from whom I will also obtain consent.

Risks to participants

Does your research involve any of the below? Children (under the age of 16),

Yes

Participants with cognitive or physical impairment that may render them unable to give informed consent,

No

Participants who may be vulnerable for personal, emotional, psychological or other reasons,

Yes

Participants who may become vulnerable as a result of the conduct of the study (e.g. because it raises sensitive issues) or as a result of what is revealed in the study (e.g. criminal behaviour, or behaviour which is culturally or socially questionable),

Yes

Participants in unequal power relations (e.g. groups that you teach or work with, in which participants may feel coerced or unable to withdraw),

No

Participants who are likely to suffer negative consequences if identified (e.g. professional censure, exposure to stigma or abuse, damage to professional or social standing),

No

Details,

This project, as with all research involving human participants, has the potential to cause a degree of psychological distress – particularly as the conversation around risk and trust in social media is often linked with

children's unsafe practices, child endangerment, and child victimisation. There is an understandable level of parental anxiety that surrounds children's usage of social media technologies and it is possible that these subjects will emerge during the interviews. In cases such as these, I will do my best to engage critically with participants and help them gain a balanced perspective on actual versus imagined risk, and their own ability to mitigate risk. It is also important to stress that the participant information sheets (attached) clearly explain the purpose of the group interviews and what parents/ children can expect.

Participants would be approached through schools and community centers where I am involved in. However, whether they take part or not would be up to them; they would also be free to withdraw from the study at all points up to submission of the thesis. That does mean that participants would have to decide for themselves and their children whether this is a project they want to participate in, or continue to participate in, if they feel vulnerable because of a previous experience, or feel vulnerable after taking part.

As the group interviews will involve children, special consideration will be made to ensure their anonymity and wellbeing. As a former councillor at Childline I have had training to help me navigate difficult conversations, and I also have an up-to-date DBS/CRB check for every country I have lived in (Bulgaria, France, the United Kingdom).

Mitigating risks to participants:

**Anonymity:** Maintaining participants' anonymity is crucial and thus all data from the interviews will be anonymised during the transcription process, removing any information that might identify the participants and their families. Original records will be kept in a secure folder, and only be available to me and my supervisors. Any data used in write-ups, in the thesis or other articles, will be anonymised.

**Well-being:** Although the questions and the activities in the interviews will not deliberately be focusing on topics that are psychologically distressing there is always a risk that the conversation can turn to a distressing topic. Participants will not be pressured into talking about topics that they find difficult and if, at any point, I sense that they are uncomfortable I will reiterate that they do not have to answer the question.

Additional attention will be paid to both verbal and non-verbal cues in children.

Participants would be given additional information on online safety, some that is targeted towards parents and some that is more appropriate for children. They would also be given the details of an appropriate mental health service (Childline or Samaritans) if the conversation raised any topics that they find distressing and want to discuss with a professional. My own training as a councillor does not

qualify me to give them mental health support but it can help if they experience any acute distress and need to process difficult emotions during the interview. In such cases the interview would have to be paused or cut short and participants would be asked if they want to withdraw. Throughout the recruitment process, I will make sure that participants know that they can withdraw at any point without giving a reason.

Informed consent: Participants will be made aware of the nature, aims and purposes of the research, both in the call for participation and prior to the interview. I will take the time to explain the project to them before the interview begins and answer any questions that they might have before and after. Detailed information will also be provided in the participant information sheet.

As the group interview will involve children, special attention will be given to both verbal and non-verbal cues. If a child appears reticent or hesitant, or stops talking, I will not push them to answer a question or get involved in an activity. If the parent appears reticent, I might try to encourage them to talk, if the context appears appropriate; however, I would be weary of posing too many questions as inter-family dynamics are complex and not always obvious, and there may be reasons why they would not want to discuss a topic in front of their children or their partner. Generally, I would use silence or a non-committal comment (such as: "That sounds..." or "Seems interesting" as encouragement for them to carry on talking, which would give them sufficient opportunity to change the topic without refusing to answer.

Right to withdraw: Participants would be made aware of their right to withdraw at any point before, during or after the interview process (up to the final submission of the thesis). They will have the opportunity to read the interview transcripts as well and comment on them.

## Design and Data

Does your study include any of the following?

Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and/or informed consent at the time?, No

Is there a risk that participants may be or become identifiable?, No

Is pain or discomfort likely to result from the study?, No

Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?,

No

Does this research require approval from the NHS?, No

If so what is the NHS Approval number,

Are drugs, placebos or other substances to be administered to the study participants, or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?,

No

Will human tissue including blood, saliva, urine, faeces, sperm or eggs be collected or used in the project?, No

Will the research involve the use of administrative or secure data that requires permission from the appropriate authorities before use?, No

Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?, No

Is there a risk that any of the material, data, or outcomes to be used in this study has been derived from ethically-unsound procedures?, No

Details,

#### Risks to the Environment / Society

Will the conduct of the research pose risks to the environment, site, society, or artifacts?, No

Will the research be undertaken on private or government property without permission?, No

Will geological or sedimentological samples be removed without permission?, No

Will cultural or archaeological artifacts be removed without permission?, No

Details,

#### Risks to Researchers/Institution

Does your research present any of the following risks to researchers or to the institution?

Is there a possibility that the researcher could be placed in a vulnerable situation either emotionally or physically (e.g. by being alone with vulnerable, or potentially aggressive participants, by entering an unsafe environment, or by working in countries in which there is unrest)?, No

Is the topic of the research sensitive or controversial such that the researcher could be ethically or legally compromised (e.g. as a result of disclosures made during the research)?,

No

Will the research involve the investigation or observation of illegal practices, or the participation in illegal practices?, No

Could any aspects of the research mean that the University has failed in its duty to care for researchers, participants, or the environment / society?,

No

Is there any reputational risk concerning the source of your funding?, No

Is there any other ethical issue that may arise during the conduct of this study that could bring the institution into disrepute?, No

Details,

#### Declaration

By submitting this form, I declare that the questions above have been answered truthfully and to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that I take full responsibility for these responses. I undertake to observe ethical principles throughout the research project and to report any changes that affect the ethics of the project to the University Research Ethics Committee for review.

Certificate produced for user ID, PCTL001

Date:	16/05/2018 21:05
Signed by:	Bozukova, Katya (2015)
Digital Signature:	
Certificate dated:	5/16/2018 9:15:43 PM
Files uploaded:	Consent Form for Participants.docx Information Sheet for participants 4.docx

## **Appendix 9: Post-Interview Participant Brief**

You are receiving this brief because you participated in the project “Intergenerational Perceptions of Risk and Trust in Social Media Technologies”, and indicated that this was your preferred method of learning about the findings. The final project has not yet been submitted, so if you have anything you would like to add following your participation, please do not hesitate to contact the main researcher at [katya.bozukova.2015@live.rhul.ac.uk](mailto:katya.bozukova.2015@live.rhul.ac.uk).

### **A preface to the findings**

This research would not have been possible without your help, your honesty, your willingness to take part and to encourage others to participate as well. Thank you so much for this!

These findings will be part of the thesis, and hopefully be published in academic and non-academic publications. It is my hope that they will make a useful contribution – however modest – to the ways in which we approach risk and trust on social media.

It is worth noting that those findings are based on a sample of 11 families, or 38 individual participants. That’s a lot of people, and it also means many others have not had a chance to have their views heard. As such, what is true for this group of participants will not necessarily be true for everyone in the UK; it may, however, help the families, and others like them, in navigating social media with more confidence.

### **What have been the aims of the project?**

To explore the ways in which perceptions of risk and trust impact the usage of social media technologies in the family;

To explore the factors that influence said perceptions.

While these findings are by no means definitive, and more research is needed to see whether they can be applied across a broad group of people, they are nonetheless interesting because they do contradict some common assumptions about children and social media

### **What are the main findings?**

There were a number of findings that came up from the interviews, but these are the key ones which are of particular relevance to families with children that are about to or have already entered social media.

The generational gap in how parents and children perceive risk and trust on social media is smaller than previously thought

A lot of writing around children and social media assumes that young people are both naturally more technologically adept than their parents, and more inclined to risk-seeking behaviours. Despite being two different assumptions, they are often conflated in non-academic literature to create an image of children that are both too smart and too inexperienced for their own good.

The data from the interviews, however, does not give enough evidence to suggest there is such a gap. Children's usage did not appear to be too different from those of their parents, and both in the question and answer part, and the game part, there was no group of participants that seemed more risk-prone than the other. Where differences in perceptions toward risk and trust in social media were detected, it was hard to say whether they were due to the age of the participant, or their previous experience, knowledge, temperament, mood, or particular needs at the moment.

Trust plays an important role in how families construct their social media practices

In all of the families interviewed, there was a lot of trust reported between parents and children. Family members appeared to be fairly independent as to how they used social media, relying on their judgements on most occasions; however, younger participants also reported trusting their parents' judgement, and the parents reported trusting their children about social media more often than not. As such, a lot of the family practices around social media technologies were comparatively autonomous, but also built upon a lot of trust. The implication was that, if trust were not present, then the family practices around social media would be a lot more strict.

This has significant implications because the trust between parents and children is what allowed the children the opportunity to explore social media and to spend time with their friends. Simultaneously, parents were able to trust that their children would come to them if there was a problem – even if they were still concerned about giving them too much autonomy too early.

**The differences in usage of social media between children and parents can be due to a number of factors**

Usage and perception of social media were influenced by a number of factors, both positive and negative. Among positive factors listed were previous experiences, prior knowledge, self-confidence, and catering one's own social circle to ensure that risk was managed to the best of

the participant's ability. Among negative factors listed by participants were stories heard both on traditional and social media, stories from friends, and stories from schools.

One interesting factor that was raised during the interviews was the parents' perceptions that the schools their children went to were not sufficiently supportive in teaching them about online safety or approaching topics such as cyberbullying. In a few cases, parents perceived the school as adding to the problem, either by dispensing advice that was considered as outdated and out-of-touch, or by demanding that the children used a school-wide social media network or person iPads in order to do their schoolwork.

On their part, children showed themselves to have significant expertise in managing risk on social media from strangers, and evaluating when situations were likely to become risky. Many children had a lot of critiques for social media platforms for what they perceived to be failure to enforce community guidelines, and perceived their schools to be inefficient in dealing with issues such as cyberbullying.

It is hard to underestimate the role of peer pressure in both adults and children as regards to how social media is being used

Indeed, both adults and children interviewed for this project seemed to be either ambivalent or sceptical about social media. Nonetheless, they engaged with social media platforms because they felt like they would be excluded socially if they did not participate. This had wide-ranging implications:

First, the parents themselves reported feeling excluded if they did not participate on social media, or feeling pressured to share more than they were willing to share with members of their off-line social circle. Some found it useful for certain specific things, many described it in negative terms.

Second, children overwhelmingly connected social media with friendly interactions. Even when they discussed useful aspects of social media, it was in relation to their existing social circles.

Third, parents expressed concern that their children would be socially isolated if they were prevented from using social media.

Fourth, parents also expressed concern about how much screen time their children had every day.

Fifth, children expressed a wide range of feelings about talking to their friends online – from excitement to indifference to concern.

Sixth, children stressed in the interview how they were very careful who they followed and how they wouldn't follow anyone they did not know. At the same time both the children and their parents expressed concern about inappropriate content filtering through to their feeds, which shows that even their measures were not wholly sufficient.

Seventh, in the context of the game, both children and adults had no difficulty blocking overtly risky scenarios; however, when risk was introduced by a friend or a family member (or someone pretending to be a friend or a family member) it took them a lot longer to enforce boundaries and block the person than when the risk came from a stranger – which suggests that a group of people is only as safe online as their least security-conscious member.

It is also hard to understate the importance of boundaries and enforcing boundaries when an individual was online

Despite the more rigorous monitoring methods that some parents and children reported engaging with – limiting screen time, having parental apps on mobile devices, curating the online social circle – the most powerful tool at the family's disposal was boundary enforcing. In other words, it was the individual being able to recognise what was acceptable, what was not, and being able to block/mute/report the risky person from their feed. In some cases, intervention from a parent was called for, to choose an appropriate course of action and to perform technical safety actions, such as purging the history on a specific app.

However, when a high-risk scenario was introduced by a “friendly” person, it was much more difficult to enforce boundaries online

Worth reiterating here is the finding from the game. When a risky interaction was initiated by a stranger, many participants had no issue identifying and blocking the interaction. However, when the risky situation was introduced by a friend, or a family member (or even a friend-of-a-friend), participants struggled to enforce boundaries, concerned about causing offense or creating conflict that might spill into day to day interaction. While that is not by itself problematic, it does underline the need for more communal responsibility for social media safety and risk management. A friend group is only as secure as its least security-conscious member, both to prevent victimisation and cyberbullying, and combatting it if it occurs. Thus, it shows that the responsibility to teach people about social media mores and how to act when

you see something wrong online lies with the wider community, and not just the individual family.

### **What happens next?**

What these findings have shown are several important things:

First, the subject of teaching young people about social media technologies is a nuanced and multi-faceted topic. A one-size fit all approach is not enough to support children who are just entering the online world, and there is a need for a personalised approach towards the needs of families and individual children.

Second, it is hard to understate the importance of trust between family members in the building of family practices around social media technologies. There will likely be a need for more, not less trust, in order for families to prepare younger members for life on social media.

Third, the option of simply not being on social media is not tenable for many people – not necessarily because the wider world has become less safe, but because the peer pressure to only socialise on social media is growing. Without opportunities to socialise outside of social media, and the tools to organise oneself without the support of social media, there will not be a way to cut social media out of people’s lives. For this reason, more effort has to be made towards installing a sense of community responsibility for online behaviours.

Fourth, a group of friends is only as safe online as their least security-conscious member. This means that the responsibility to install a sense of community responsibility online doesn’t lie in just individual parents – it also lies with the whole social group. In practical terms this means that schools, parents of friends, and external educators have to be consistent about the messaging they are passing along about what is appropriate to do online, what is not, how to recognise risky behaviours, and how to respond to those behaviours. It is well-known that bystanders have the most power to shut down cyberbullying situations, but what this project has demonstrated is that bystanders also have the power to spot and prevent other kinds of risky behaviours too.

The key takeaway from this research, really, is that creating a safer online environment is something that many people have to come together to create. It is not something tech companies are capable of creating by themselves, and it is not something that any individual family has the power to implement either. Rather, educators, families, and policy-makers must collaborate

and be consistent about the messaging that is being passed onto children, so that the children can feel confident about navigating social media as they grow older.