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Exploring Media Literacy Formation at the Intersection of Family, School, and Peers

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Abstract

Today, media literacy and digital skills are essential for personal communication and social interaction. Children and adolescents need these skills to act autonomously in highly digitised social contexts. These skills are acquired in different social spaces, most frequently and primarily at home, followed by peer groups, school, and extracurricular activities. The present study aims to conceptually situate media literacy within a broader network of social power relations. It is therefore grounded in an academic theoretical framework that constructs media literacy as a form of digital cultural capital. As such, media literacy also contains the principles of media preferences and choices that condition the media choices of young people. This draws our attention to the social contexts in which media literacy and digital skills of children and teenagers are formed: within the family, school, and peers. With a selective thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with 67 primary and secondary school students (12–19 years), the empirical research is focused on different contextual incentives and regulations related to the formation of students' media literacy, primarily in relation to digital media. First, we examine parenting practices that frame home access to media and media practices within families. Then, we explore the characteristics of formal media education within schools, which seems limited to teaching with/through media. Finally, we identify peer networks as important promoters of both digital capital and elements of advanced media practices and skills, compared to the media literacy encouraged within families and schools.

Keywords

digital capital; media education; media literacy; media practices; primary school students; secondary school students

1. Introduction

Today, media literacy (ML) and digital skills are essential foundations for personal communication and social interaction (Carretero et al., 2017; Hobbs, 2010). Children and adolescents need these skills to act autonomously in highly digitised social contexts. These skills are acquired in different social spaces, most frequently and primarily at home, followed by peer groups, school, and extracurricular activities. The present study aims to conceptually situate ML formation within a broader framework of social power relations that shape the various ways in which young people become media literate. This draws attention to the social contexts in which ML as digital capital of children and teenagers is formed: within the family, school, and peers. We have chosen these three spaces because socialisation mainly takes place in two phases—primary and secondary socialisation—each of which is influenced by different agents, such as family, school, and peers. With a selective thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with 67 primary and secondary school students (12–19 years), the empirical research focuses on incentives and regulations related to the formation of students' ML and their media repertoires. First, we examine parenting practices that frame home access to media and media practices within families, as the primary social context of young people's capital accumulation. Then, we explore the characteristics of formal media education within secondary school, which seems to be limited to teaching with/through media (Buckingham, 2003). Finally, we identify peer networks as potentially important promotors of ML, often introducing young people to experiences that might be beyond the scope of what is otherwise familiar to them.

2. Cognitive and Social Dimension of ML Formation

When viewed against the backdrop of a normative understanding of media, ML is a cognitive attribute, a skill that a person develops continuously (see, e.g., Potter, 2004) through media education. Media education can be more or less spontaneous, coincidental, purposeful, structured, formalised, and institutionalised, and can result in different forms of ML. In general terms, following Potter's cognitive theory of ML, it allows us to control our own exposure to media and media-mediated content and serves as the basis for constructing our own meanings (Potter, 2004, pp. 58–59). From the perspective of the individual, more ML translates to greater emancipatory potential of media consumption; that is, better access to desired content, less risk of negative effects of media consumption, and greater effectiveness in realising personal goals with and through media, e.g., in terms of being informed or entertained (Potter, 2004). However, media education, as a complex process of ML formation, transcends the cognitive dimension and is socially structured: it depends on social, cultural, political, economic, geographic, and other factors. Moreover, conceptualisations of ML, confronted with the so-called deep mediatisation (Hepp, 2019) of everyday life, are now densely intertwined with information infrastructures and media, in which new practices of everyday life, coming of age, and education are emerging alongside the ever-new technological capabilities of media (Buckingham, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Potter, 2004).

Certain studies conceptualise contemporary youth as digital natives, thereby superficially drawing an equivalence between the ubiquity of technology and the supposedly inherent endowment of young people with the skills to use digital media (Prensky, 2011; Thomas, 2011). In fact, ML is the result of a broad and complex media education, which, in addition to formal education in educational institutions, includes media socialisation in the context of the home, participation in peer-to-peer media practices, and many other spaces of coming-of-age, whether educational in nature or otherwise. Indeed, the material access to media,

such as being equipped with a telephone or computer and having an internet connection, and so-called cognitive access, which includes digital competences in the use of digital media and technologies, are only the necessary conditions for the formation of ML and by no means sufficient conditions (see Ranieri & Fabbro, 2019).

The processual nature of ML (Potter, 2004) implies a continuous development of the critical reception and production of media messages through technology and the formation of the civic identity of young people (see also Jenkins et al., 2016; Leaning, 2017; Mihailidis, 2014; Mihailidis et al., 2014). It therefore involves the development of a wide range of skills and competences in relation to the different media, technologies, representations, symbols, and content that enable participation in public life (Buckingham, 2003; Ranieri & Fabbro, 2019), or empowerment for inclusion and equal opportunities for the contemporary youth coming of age in an intensively mediatised everyday life. Hobbs (2010, pp. vii-vii), for example, builds a conceptual link between media and digital literacy, on the one hand, and civic literacy, on the other. A related concept of critical ML is advocated by Kellner and Share (2007), who, while critically analysing information, power, and the relationships between media and audiences, propose extending ML by understanding mass communication and popular culture, as well as multiculturalism (Kellner & Share, 2005). Similarly, Ranieri and Fabbro (2019) propose a model of intercultural media education, whereby material and cognitive access to media are prerequisites for: understanding the mechanisms of the media landscape and assessing media content and the contexts in which it is produced, as well as the opportunities and constraints associated with it; developing creativity or production skills; and active participation in society through media, which in turn requires an environment of incentives for learning, self-reflection, and participation in the digitised everyday life. Critical media education therefore goes beyond the instrumentalist role of digital media and technology in education, especially when these media are predominantly used to illustrate learning content or simply to teach the use of technology as a tool, as problematised by several authors (Buckingham, 2003; Hepp, 2019; Jenkins et al., 2016; Leaning, 2017). Consequently, the present article refers to Ranieri and Fabbro's (2019) aforementioned model, focusing on the environmental factors of media education, primarily on the material accessibility of digital media and encouragements and deterrents to ML formation among family members and peers, and in schools.

3. ML as Digital Capital

As the above discussion suggests, at least implicitly, ML is always shaped in and by specific social contexts. Despite the initial promise of technology and especially the internet as great levellers of social inequalities, these contexts remain marked by asymmetrical social power relations. Notwithstanding the thesis of the end of history (Fukuyama, 2006), these power relations have not been eliminated to any significant extent by Western societies; they are still reproduced through traditional arenas of social reproduction such as the family and school, as well as through peer relationships, which, especially in young people, constitute a key source of social judgement, as analysed by Perger (2024).

The contemporary world is marked by the third industrial revolution (Castells, 2010; Rifkin, 2011), also known as the digital revolution, which designates the transition from industrial production based on mechanical and analogue technology to digital information and communication technologies, as well as deep mediatisation (Hepp, 2019). ML is becoming increasingly important for the functioning of individuals and societies, while at the same time representing a potentially new axis for the reproduction of social

inequalities. As evidenced by the various conceptualisations of the digital divide, the gap goes beyond ownership of technology and is rapidly widening in the area of digital skills, usage, and the benefits derived from digital technology, thus encompassing both material and cognitive aspects of media use (see, e.g., Šimenc, 2021). Gaps in material access to digital media and technology are particularly evident in studies regarding the conditions of ML formation in the Global South and North (Katz, 2022), which find, inter alia, that access to the internet and to devices such as computers tends to be scarcer for young people from the Global South (Livingstone, Kardefelt-Winther, & Saeed, 2019, p. 66). At the same time, as Robinson et al. (2020, p. 2) point out, the increasingly complex and interrelated nature of digital inequalities creates a so-called "digital inequalities stack," where individual levels of the stack can have an impact on other levels. In other words, digital inequalities can be understood as inequalities in access to, use of, and benefits from digital technologies, which can be manifested in various forms and often exacerbate existing social, economic, and educational inequalities.

ML and the inequalities it entails can also be understood in the context of what some authors have referred to as digital capital, drawing on the conceptualisations of capital by Pierre Bourdieu. Broadly speaking, capital is a resource that accumulates over time and can be mobilised to create specific values. Capital thus represents "the ability to exert control over one's own future and the future of others. The capital that individuals can accumulate determines their life trajectory" (Postone, 1993, pp. 4–5).

Bourdieu (2004) distinguished between economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. By adding other forms of capital to economic capital (monetary resources), he drew attention to the importance of cultural capital, which is primarily accumulated in the family. Cultural capital exists in three forms: in embodied form, as the permanent dispositions of an individual, their knowledge, skills, and abilities; in materialised form, as cultural heritage (e.g., paintings, books, devices); and in institutionalised form (diplomas, awards, success in competitions, etc.). Alongside these, social capital is also important, as it represents a set of contacts, acquaintances, friendships, and duties, forming relatively durable networks of relationships, and thus constitutes a central element of social ties, even if it often exists only as a potential. In this respect, Bourdieu notes that the key to understanding how capitals work is to recognise that they can be transformed into one another; for example, the economic capital of a family and the social capital of the parents are transformed into different forms of cultural capital by the children of that family, which they will be able to transform into other forms of capital in the future, e.g., through the attainment of a diploma that will give them access to a job and thus to economic capital.

Applying this conceptualisation of forms of capital to the digital world, we observe that a person who owns a computer (an economic and objectified form of capital) must have embodied cultural capital in order to use this device for a specific purpose, such as participating in online classrooms. An example of a person who owns a device and requests help with its use, e.g., from a sibling or friend, is a form of cultural and social capital unequally distributed in society. As Park (2017, p. 69) emphasises, "intangible forces of society, such as social and cultural capital, in contrast to the monetary forces that come into play in modern societies, can explain the variances in people's ability to mobilise resources to use digital technologies." If owning a device means owning cultural capital, then having someone to ask for help, someone who can provide help, represents social capital.

While we have indicated, like Ignatow and Robinson (2017), that the original concept of different forms of capital can also be applied to the study of the digital society, some researchers argue that it would make

more sense to combine all of these forms into one and discuss digital capital separately, because digital engagement always includes all of the aforementioned forms of capital. Calderón Gómez (2020) proposes a slightly different definition of digital capital "as a sub-form of cultural capital linked to the use of digital technologies and contemporary cyber culture" (p. 4). According to this definition, digital capital can be found in two distinct forms:

> First, (a) as embodied digital capital (EDC), it is internalised in the habitus by means of digital skills, dispositions, motivations, interests, expectations and past experiences that affect digital practices. Apart from digital skills, EDC also includes a vast repertory of digital cultural dispositions that constitute digital literacy….Second, (b) objectified digital capital (ODC) is materialised in digital equipment, devices and the technological infrastructure. (Calderón Gómez, 2020, pp. 4–5)

As part of digital (cultural) capital or one of its forms, ML, like other forms of capital, is produced in a socially unequal way, insofar as the accumulation of different forms of capital is always related to the individual's position in the social space. At the same time, the socially differentiated appropriation of ML—again similar to other forms of capital theorised by Bourdieu—has important implications for opportunities for the future appropriation of capital, and thus for the occupation of social positions in the future. It is precisely for this reason that the following section focuses on the identification of the different elements and building blocks of young people's ML in the three social fields that are crucial for them: family, school, and peer relations. We focus on these three social fields because they are of central importance for the accumulation of capital and the formation of the dispositions of the young person, or the formation of what Bourdieu (2002) calls habitus. The family thus represents a space of primary capital accumulation and the formation of the primary habitus of individuals. In relation to digital capital, the family regulates the primary access to digital capital in its material or objectified form (computers, internet connection, smartphones, digital platforms, videogames, apps, and computer programs), which can vary in quality of technology and sophistication (Calderón Gómez, 2020). The family is also the primary space of the accumulation of digital capital in its embodied form (from tastes in media consumption to skills in managing digital technologies and other aspects of ML), as well as being an important agent of social capital, which can provide support in digital media activities (Courtois & Verdegem, 2016).

On the other hand, the school and peers represent spaces of secondary accumulation of various forms of capital and the formation of the secondary habitus of the young person. As Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) point out, school is one of the fundamental institutions of reproducing social power relations; it represents a space for the transfer of legitimate knowledge, the kind of knowledge that is worth acquiring, including knowledge related to ML. Furthermore, school is the central space for the transfer of institutionalised cultural capital in the form of qualifications and diplomas (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; see also Bourdieu, 2004). With regard to ML and digital capital, schools can also provide young people with access to material digital capital, whether in the form of more specialised devices that most students might not have access to, such as 3D printers, or by providing access to more common digital resources, such as supplying computers to students without access to such resources at home. This role of schools as providers of material access can also be accompanied by the school's role in providing young people with cognitive access or embodied forms of cultural capital related to digital media, whether in the form of encouragement or discouragement to engage with digital media, or in the form of transferring specific digital media skills and knowledge to young people as part of its fundamental role in knowledge transfer.

In terms of capital, peer networks are often analysed in relation to social capital and its translation into economic or cultural capital. Furthermore, peer relationships are often analysed in terms of homophily, a principle of the formation of social ties by which we choose peers who are socially similar to us (Bottero, 2007; Lenkewitz, 2022; McPherson et al., 2001), while emphasising that peer networks can both amplify and alleviate social inequality (Basov, 2020; Lenkewitz, 2022). With regard to digital media, peers represent important agents of support in developing ML, thus also contributing to digital capital formation (Courtois & Verdegem, 2016). Research also shows that young people often use social media to extend offline relationships into the online sphere (Ito et al., 2009; Lim, 2022), while some studies (Krämer et al., 2021) demonstrate the importance of strong ties, including friendship ties, in offering online social support to young people. The online sphere also offers young people opportunities to encounter phenomena that are less known to them, as well as to engage with various learning opportunities (Krämer et al., 2021) and people who share common interests but do not necessarily align with their demographic and social position.

4. Description of the Research, Methodology, and Qualitative Data Analysis

The present study is part of a national fundamental research project entitled Media Repertoires Among the Youth: Social, Political and Cultural Aspects of Digitalised Everyday Life (J5–2564), within the framework of which our data were collected and analysed. Recruitment was conducted in two phases: primary and secondary schools were first invited to participate, and only after the school principals agreed did we contact the students and their parents to obtain their informed consent. The interviews, which mostly lasted one to two hours, were conducted in spring 2021, when interviewing students in person was not possible due to restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The focus groups were therefore adapted for online execution via the Zoom platform, which was well known to the participants, as it was also used for distance schooling. Following the recommendations of certain research on the quality conducting of focus groups by videoconferencing (Lobe & Morgan, 2020), the focus groups were conducted with a smaller number of participants, mostly with two or three people each time.

With 27 focus groups, we achieved a diverse non-random sample of 67 students aged 12–19 years from various family and school backgrounds and from different urban, suburban, and rural settings in Slovenia (see Table 1). The sampling objective was also to include students with various socio-economic backgrounds; however, with one or two exceptions, we primarily reached students from middle-class families, as recruitment was done via schools that were unable to follow the instructions due to lower interest in participation among students from lower social classes.

The questionnaire was organised into seven thematic sections: (a) memories of early media usage; (b) media practices, social networks, and technological preferences; (c) equipment, access, and regulations of technology; (d) norms and habits of media and technology practices in schools and among peers; (e) digital technology appropriation in schools; (f) media and technology use in spare time; and (g) possibilities, pressures, and aspirations. Each person participated in one focus group discussion.

As we were primarily interested in the broader context of media education and ML formation, we adopted Ranieri and Fabbro's (2019) definition of media education. In the process of analysing the data acquired in the focus groups, we concentrated on selected components of this definition that are the most crucial "environmental" factors in shaping the conditions for ML development: the material and cognitive

Table 1. Demographic background of the focus group participants.

Type of school		
Primary	40%	27
Secondary	60%	40
Total	100%	67
Gender		
Male	45%	30
Female	55%	37
Total	100%	67
Age		
12	7%	4
13	8%	5
14	14%	8
15	20%	12
16	17%	10
17	15%	9
18	15%	9
19	3%	2
Total	99%	59
Geographical setting		
Urban	68%	40
Suburban	17%	10
Rural	15%	9
Total	100%	59

accessibility of media, together with the environment and encouraging ML formation, which are the basis for all other media practices and more complex forms of ML, such as critical and analytical media reading skills or participation through media. We will therefore analyse in more detail: (a) the family context (technological or media access at home, media practices, use of technology, and transfer of digital media skills within the family); (b) the experience of students in the classroom (accessibility and regulation of technology, digital, and ML in the school context); and (c) the peer setting (role models in terms of technological literacy and behaviour with and through media).

Thematic coding was conducted in two steps. It was first approached in an unstructured manner without predefined codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 2017), focusing on the three thematic strands mentioned above in relation to the underlying conditions and broader contexts of ML formation within families, school, and peers. In the next step, the axial coding phase, the analysis was narrowed to codes and categories that offer insights into the material and cognitive access and (dis)inclinations or incentives for ML within the family, school, and peer groups, which are essential elements of the formative environment of ML, as evidenced in the analysis (see code categories 8, 11, and 12 in Table 2).

Table 2. Code/category occurrence for environmental factors shaping ML.

Code/category no.	Code/category name	Code/category occurrence
8	Incentives for media education and participation	421
8-A	Family	234
8-B	School	96
8-C	Peers	91
11	Cognitive access, use of media and technology, self-reporting on their own skills and those of important others	841
12	Material access at home, in school, via friends or peers	324

Note: Code/category occurrence is the sum of all quotes marked with the code or category, whereby the same quote may be marked with multiple codes, including those within the same category.

5. Findings

5.1. Family and Different Forms of Incentives as Building Blocks for Young People's ML

Material access to media is fundamental for the development of ML. Our respondents report that they do not experience any problems in this respect. Most of them have a computer in their room and own a smartphone. It is worth noting that, especially for the participating primary school pupils, the computer was often introduced into children's rooms with the onset of the pandemic and the introduction of distance schooling, or was present only in exceptional cases, such as with gamers: "I have a computer and a phone, and now that my brother isn't really interested in the Nintendo Switch we bought together, I have it in my room" (GR, male, 15, primary school). As mentioned above, material and cognitive access should also be read against the backdrop of parents' various approaches to media regulation. On the one hand, this includes their positive reactions to media, facilitating conversations about media and their use, and guiding young people through the mediatised landscape; on the other hand, it comprises more restrictive approaches, such as focusing primarily on parental control, which may be related to the time children spend on social media or the content they follow.

The interviews revealed frequent restrictive practices by parents, which are usually linked to rules limiting the time spent on media and bans on the use of a device or its confiscation if school performance deteriorates: "Um, in my family, my mum sets these rules...and...during the week, Monday to Thursday, I can use my phone until nine o'clock, but at the weekend I can use it as much as I want, um" (DA, male, 14, primary school). Parents occasionally show interest in the media content in which their children are interested and discuss the content with their children. Most of the time, however, adolescents report that their parents trust them and do not restrict them too much: "This used to be the rule with social media, my mum knows which apps I have because I talk to her about this, but she doesn't really care because she knows that I won't do anything wrong" (ZA, female, 14, primary school).

The participants rated their parents' digital skills and mastery of digital devices as relatively good, typically attributing their digital skills to their use of a computer for work, as was noted by ZA (female, 14, primary school): "My mum, I mean...my mum uses computers at work, for the whole day, actually...so she's good with email and stuff...she can also type really fast."

The interviewees remarked on various instances when they turn to their parents for support related to media use, as in the case of AN (female, 18, secondary school): "Yeah, my dad has to know a lot because of his job. So he's definitely the one that taught me the basics, he also helps me with computers."

The students further differentiate between the skills of their fathers and mothers, often seeing themselves as the ones who are more skilled on telephones and social media: "They don't, because I don't think they know enough about these things [social media], it's more that I warn them" (LI, female, 18, secondary school).

5.2. School as a Space of Formal ML Formation

As in reading or mathematical literacy, education can play an extremely important role when it comes to ML formation. Its role can be twofold: it can contribute to enhancing cognitive access, while it should also compensate for a lack of material access to media or devices, in line with its fundamental task of reducing social and economic inequalities and their impact on students' academic performance. Although one participant mentioned that the school lends computer equipment to disadvantaged students, the school's role in bridging material inaccessibility remains not mentioned in our interviews.

Young people's experience of school and media skills is also quite modest in relation to cognitive access. Indeed, the responses of our interviewees show a distinct instrumentalist understanding of media and technologies in Slovenian education. With rare exceptions, the statements of our interviewees suggest that media in schools are mainly used as convenient tools, e.g., to implement the learning process remotely through videoconferencing systems and online classrooms, to test knowledge through online quizzes, to present or deliver material using a computer projector or an electronic whiteboard, or to illustrate learning content and enrich the classroom by using interactive textbooks and showing videos instead of conducting experiments in the classroom: "Um, I mean, the teacher just says, like, go to the virtual classrooms, I left you something in there, go and have a look. Something like that, or we Google something" (MJ, male, 17, secondary school).

Apart from education through media, primary schools rarely offer media and technology education. When they do, it is mostly limited to workshops on online safety awareness and, judging by some of the participants' statements, is considered redundant: "It's kind of pointless because they all keep saying the same thing. Almost the same thing year after year" (SV, female, 15, primary school).

Another prominent feature in the school context is the strict regulation of access to digital technology, which translates to a ban on phone use during classes and recess, or even the presence of phones in the classroom:

> And, that's why we have this box, so that when we come to school, we all put our phones in the box and halfway through the main break, that is, an hour before the end of school, you can take your phone, but you have to put it in your school bag. (SN, female, 14, primary school)

The smartphone, which can be a useful learning tool, a tool for finding information, or a calculator, is thus most often labelled as a distraction from the educational process in the context of education. The attitude to the use of media and technology in students' school work outside regular school hours is somewhat more liberal. It is then that the phone is more often used as a learning tool to find resources for school assignments,

or as a platform to organise class groups for learning or for informing and consulting classmates through social networks and other applications:

> Um, well, we have this Facebook group where there are a few students from my school and sometimes we post things about test and such....Yeah, well, we usually get on a call, and, well, we do things together. I mean, if someone needs help. (JE, male, 17, secondary school)

5.3. Classmates, Friends, Peers: Interactions, Expectations, and Encounters With the Undomesticated

Contrary to frequent public laments about young people not socialising enough and spending too much online, our interviewees are keen on using social media to socialise and communicate, and it is these activities that our respondents most often highlighted in the context of their media routine. They typically use several different social media networks, with Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, and Viber being the most common. Messaging is limited to a small circle with whom they also have face-to-face contact. It is worth pointing out, however, that young people differentiate both content and, at least to some extent, social networks according to the closeness of their relationships or the strength of the social ties that bind them. JA (male, 12, primary school) elaborates on this point as follows:

> I use Viber mostly to talk to my classmates in our Viber group....I only use Snapchat to talk to my friends. There are rarely people I don't know in person, just people who I met first and then we started talking on Snapchat.

Social media groups were particularly often used to chat with classmates, and have an explicitly instrumental role in young people's lives: "Yeah, I use Snapchat for school the most, because, umm....I talk to my classmates there, if I need something" (BO, female, 15, secondary school).

School tasks are far from the only topic of online discussion among peers. Our interviews also indicate the role media play in sharing common interests and developing peer-sanctioned tastes. Hence, the practices of recommending and discussing a variety of media content—from TV series and films to news and books—are also relatively frequent topics in the interviews:

> Then, like, I mean, right now, depending on when I get that book from my classmate, which I'm waiting for, but otherwise, if I had enough time, I could actually read it really fast. It depends on how thick it is, of course. (VI, female, 13, primary school)

> Mmm, I saw, about a year ago, Riverdale, when people were talking about it. Um...currently, as my friends suggested, I'm watching a series called Blacklist, because I'm interested in it, and I like that kind of content, so, yeah. (JE, male, 17, secondary school)

Peer incentives are also important when it comes to sharing information, as peer networks can act as a source of access to information as well as a potential topic of conversation with peers, which has particularly important implications for the promotion of ML, especially when it relates to seeking information and attitudes towards socio-political developments, which are mainly encountered online:

> Basically, it seems to me that it's always more important to be informed, because if you're not informed, you're basically kind of out of society, because everyone is talking about current affairs and then you have no idea what they're talking about, you're just in the back listening and not taking part. (TK, male, 17, secondary school)

It is worth mentioning a few practices that can make an important contribution to building ML in the context of peer interactions. While the aforementioned incentives are mainly related to peers with whom young people typically meet in person, peer incentives can also include recommendations from those with whom young people share not only physical or age proximity, but also, and above all, a proximity of common interests. This is particularly true for video game and technology enthusiasts, although these interactions also expose young people to other content, such as books and educational and other content related to various aspects of their lives:

> Uh, mostly on YouTube, like the person before me mentioned—a Canadian YouTuber who builds computers. Linus Tech Tips? Yeah, I watch him. Uh…he talks about, you know, the latest tech news happening around the world….And he explains how things work and stuff. Uh….Then I also watch this electrician, he's basically an Indian guy. And, like, he shows things in a funny way, you know….Uh….And lately, I've been watching a lot of smartphone news. I mean….I'm into it, so (shrugs), it's fun to watch. (HE, male, 17, secondary school)

> So on YouTube, um, well, I, um, I like to read, so I know of this English or American girl, she's, um, older than me but still a teenager, or how should I put it….And she creates content related to books, and she makes videos….And she recommends books or, like, books she's read, tells the story, and then, like, if she likes the book….And I would read it….And so I have some ideas…(PI, female, 14, primary school)

In these types of peer interactions, the interviewees were generally passive, undertaking activities in which they primarily follow the content and do not respond to it, by leaving a comment or like, for instance.

6. Discussion

As our conversations with young people show, the social contexts in which they develop ML and digital capital in general are diverse. The family environment is characterised by a duality of affection and concern regarding media practices. The latter relates to the content that young people consume (or share) and the amount of time they spend with media, both of which are responded to by parents through more or less restrictive regulation of media consumption, with family patterns of regulation changing in parallel with changes in young people's media practices. As found in a study by Yuen et al. (2018, p. 10), parental digital competence and parental care (support, regulation) also stand out in the context of family incentives in the present study, confirming the aforementioned importance of strong ties (Krämer et al., 2021) in young people's ML formation. Our sample consists mainly of families with a higher socioeconomic status, which means that the parents of the interviewees have completed tertiary education and are digitally competent, as required by the work they do. They are therefore able to help their children with their use of technology and allow them considerable freedom in their media practices, but not without regulative interventions. In comparison, Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) tracked patterns of technology regulation in British

families: on one hand, it stems from competition and a desire for a better future for children, which drives parental support for digital skills acquisition; while, on the other hand, it is derived from conservatism, which is manifested as resistance to social change and disconnection from the digital. However, as Ignatow and Robinson (2017) warn in their analysis of existing Bourdieusian research on digitalisation, such parenting practices should not be generalised, and it would be worthwhile examining the extent to which different families encourage various forms of engagement with digital media in the Slovenian context.

With regard to the promotion of media practices, the school environment can be characterised as modest, especially when compared to the context of family and peer groups. ML, which, like other literacies, could reasonably be expected to find a place in schools, is present there mainly in the aspects identified above as technicist, consisting primarily of instructions on how to handle computers and corresponding to some aspects of cognitive access (Ranieri & Fabbro, 2019) to digital media. In this respect, the existing incentives reported by our respondents suggest that media education in schools occurs on a basic level, such as the use of dominant text editing computer programs or screening educational videos. The respondents also highlighted awareness about internet safety, which is typically taught in workshops run for schools by external organisations. This can be understood as another aspect of ML related to online privacy and safety, which schools promote within media education for the accessibility of media and technology that focuses on providing the fundamental knowledge that is a "necessary, still not sufficient, condition for media literacy" (Ranieri & Fabbro, 2019, p. 57).

Regarding media use in schools, our interviews confirm the findings of the international PISA survey, which measured students' digital skills in 2018. According to recent data (OECD, 2021), Slovenian students use media at school for an average of 23 minutes per week, compared to the OECD average of 41 minutes per week. Although, on average, aspects of ML are less present in Slovenian schools than in other OECD countries (OECD, 2021), Slovenian youth are more likely than their OECD peers to deal with harmful content (spam, phishing) and issues related to the consequences of disclosing personal data online (OECD, 2021). Concerns about the latter were also evident in the interviews with our respondents, who often reported not posting their personal data and photos, and generally having restricted access to their social media profiles, giving them more control over who can access their content. Given the social trends associated with digitalisation, it thus seems that education in Slovenia is missing out on opportunities to equip young people with ML and thus to reduce the inequalities that are in one way or another associated with ML and more broadly with digital capital (see Robinson et al., 2020). Moreover, Slovenian schools seem to miss the opportunity to promote material access (Ranieri & Fabbro, 2019) to digital media and technology and only bridge the digital divide on the material level to a lesser degree. Even though schools are mostly well equipped with broadband internet connectivity and digital devices, they seem to rarely incentivise the use of these technologies among students (limited access to computer classrooms) and they only rarely lend devices to students with lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The peer incentives of young people can perhaps be described as the most varied and dynamic, which is not surprising given the deep mediatisation of their lives and the importance they place on peer contact. Peer networks enable young people to accumulate social capital in both of the senses usually attributed to it: as bonding within a group and as a means of bridging distances between groups (see Putnam, 2000). In other words, media-based peer practices allow individuals to deepen their connections with people they already interact with in person, while also enabling young people to bridge distances and access remote groups, experiences, and information they might not otherwise encounter. The present research confirms that young people use media as digital capital in both ways. They report using social media to interact and

strengthen their ties with their offline peers, and it is through these ties that they can access sources of cultural capital, such as content suggestions and information about current affairs, as well as dispositions towards content and tastes. In this sense, it appears that peers can have an important supportive role in the formation of different aspects of ML formation, such as enabling cognitive access through content recommendations or information sharing (see also Courtois & Verdegem, 2016). However, this further raises the question of the extent to which these types of social practices contribute to solidifying existing social norms, tastes, and media practices, as well as the extent to which they contribute to expanding or transgressing them. Moreover, there is no assurance that the content and information shared is of high quality; on the contrary, it can potentially be harmful, as research has shown (Livingstone, Kirwil, et al., 2014). Nonetheless, this can still be part of the individual's ML and digital capital profile. The present research also raises certain questions related to young people's experience of and relationships with online content creators. As seen above, young people follow various online content creators, influencers, and stars, in relation to whom they shop, shape their preferences, learn new skills, or follow current affairs, inter alia. These relationships are often termed parasocial relationships, possibly because they appear to lack the two-way nature of what is commonly believed to be a relationship. However, young people do indeed form relationships with these creators or influencers, which can range from simply following their social media accounts and liking their posts, to other levels of engagement, such as commenting, subscribing, and joining discord servers or communities on forums like Reddit. These relationships present potential sources of social capital that can then be transformed into cultural capital, including aspects of ML, e.g., by gaining book recommendations or learning how different things work. While these types of relationships can indeed create problems, they can, as our and other research shows, also offer support and knowledge (see, e.g., Tukachinsky et al., 2020; Woznicki et al., 2021), which can often transcend the support and knowledge otherwise present in the individual's life. At least some of these types of relationships can be classified as "weak ties" (see Granovetter, 1973), i.e., a connection between individuals who are not closely, intimately bonded. Despite being less intimate, these weak ties can play a crucial role in individuals' lives, offering access to broader communities, information, and experiences.

At this point, we must also highlight certain peculiarities and limitations of the present study. First, even though the sample is diverse (students from different regions and from distinct urban, suburban, and rural environments), it is also biased regarding the socio-economic backgrounds of the participants, who mostly come from socioeconomically privileged families with better (than the national average) educated parents. In addition, the focus groups were conducted online during pandemic lockdowns, not face-to-face, which might have contributed to at least slightly limited insight into the participants' responses during the interviews. Furthermore, due to the impact of the pandemic on young people's media practices (see, e.g., Črnič & Švab, 2020; Jones et al., 2021; Mælan et al., 2021), we can assume that pre-pandemic media practices were different, more regulated, and less important for maintaining peer contact. Moreover, experiences with media and technology were limited in schools before the epidemic, whereas during remote schooling, digital media became a tool through which education took place. Therefore, the potential effects of the pandemic on media practices of today's youth should not be overlooked.

7. Conclusion

In the present article, we attempted to highlight the multifaceted nature of ML formation among young people in Slovenia, which is shaped by diverse social contexts, such as the family, school, and peer

relationships. Families play a crucial role in primary technological domestication as well as in balancing freedom and regulation regarding media practices. However, our research does not provide insight into variations related to media regulation in families that occupy different social positions. As perceived by our interviewees, schools tend to provide only basic media education, primarily focused on technical skills and internet safety, adopting a predominantly instrumentalist integration of media content and technologies into the educational process (Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham et al., 2001; Jenkins et al., 2016), while missing opportunities to foster a more comprehensive understanding of ML. In contrast, peer interactions prove to be a dynamic space for developing both social and digital capital, allowing young people to strengthen relationships and gain access to new information and cultural resources. The influence of parasocial relationships with online creators further expands the ML landscape, offering both opportunities for learning and challenges related to the quality of shared information. Our findings underscore the importance of considering these varied influences when discussing young people's ML, and suggest that future research should further explore how it is impacted by different social positions. In addition, future research might benefit from further studying the ways in which media are changing the structure of the individual's social ties and networks, and the implications of this for producing, reproducing, and potentially transforming social relations.

Funding

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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