

Fundación **MAPFRE**

**THE USE OF THE INTERNET  
AMONG 13-16 YEARS-OLD  
IN MALTA AND GOZO**



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# 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a quantitative research study on the use of Internet by 13-16-year-old in Malta and Gozo.

This study formed part of the broader *Logging Off 2022-2023* initiative commissioned and funded by Fundación MAPFRE<sup>1</sup>.

The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee of the University of Malta reviewed and authorised the research design of the study (Appendix 1), subject to approvals of gatekeepers concerned, which was obtained as requested.

Data collection took place between April and June 2023, using a quantitative questionnaire administered through schools as gatekeepers, and primarily online – with a few print-post-return exceptions, when required.

A total of 245 youths of ages 13 to 16 years participated in this study.

Consideration of findings and conclusions needs to factor the overall margin of error of +/-6.2%<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Objectives

This study queried and mapped the use of Internet by 13-16-years-old in Malta and Gozo, with special attention to:

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1 Fundación MAPFRE is a Spanish non-profit institution founded in 1975 with the goal to contribute to the welfare of citizens and society. It is also represented in Malta. More information on Fundación MAPFRE is available here: <https://www.fundacionmapfre.org/>

2 This is in line with national standards and positions on good practices, e.g., the National Statistics Office (NSO, Malta) publishes findings when the margin of error does not exceed 29%. Additionally, it does not publish any counts (i.e., responses to specific questions) that are less than 20 (Methodology Unit, National Statistics Office (Malta), email communication, April 7, 2016).

- a. online and offline routines, related skills and attitudes, and correlations between these and select socio-demographics of participants, namely: gender, age, type of school (state, Church, independent), region of residence and household composition;
- b. problematic Internet use, particularly as informed by the study *The prevalence of Problematic Internet Use in Malta among young persons aged 13–16 years*, published in 2017 by the (then) President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (Malta);

and

- c. the use of Internet by 13-16-years-old in Malta and Gozo in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

## 3. Report structure

Further to this introduction and the details of the methodology deployed to reach the above objectives developed in the next section, the report will present the findings of the data analysis structured in three main sections, namely:

- a. Trends, to present and elucidate findings of data analysis related to online and offline routines;
- b. Attitudes, to present and elucidate findings of data analysis related to opinions, perceptions, feelings, and reflections about being online and offline;

and

- c. Assessments: to present and elucidate findings of data analysis that concern select skills that are pertinent to being online and/or offline;

An overview of main findings, limitations and recommendations will conclude this report.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Type of study

A quantitative case study with 13–16-years-old in Malta and Gozo.

### 4.2. Timeframes of the study

September 2022 – July 2023, with data collection between April and June 2023.

### 4.3. Data collection tools

A quantitative anonymous questionnaire (Appendix 2) comprising a mixed of closed-ended and open-ended questions gathering socio-demographic data including gender, age, type of school (state, Church, independent), region of residence and household composition.

### 4.4. Recruitment and sampling

Participants comprised 245 students of ages 13 to 16 years (by the end of 2023), of mixed sexes and genders, attending state, Church and independent middle and secondary schools in Malta and Gozo that authorised collaboration as gatekeepers<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The researcher requested permission to collect data from the Directorate for Research Lifelong Learning & Employability (DRLLE) for state schools, the Secretariat for Catholic Education (SfCE) for Church schools, and the Heads of the independent schools.

Consequently, the DRLLE and the SfCE provided the researcher with the list of the specific schools that could be approached with a request for research (which is standard practice), whilst the researcher contacted all independent schools in Malta and Gozo with the request for this permission.

Once the stated authorities authorised the study, the researcher proceeded with sending the letter requesting permission and cooperation to carry out research to the respective Heads of School.

This was followed by accepting Heads sending out the appended online parental consent form (Appendix 3) to parents and guardians of students of ages 13-16 years attending the specific school.

The researcher sent out the information and questionnaire link with an integrated assent request (Appendix 2) to the emails of students submitted through the parental consent forms.

The researcher sent out printed copies of the Maltese and English language-versions of the questionnaire with self-addressed postage paid envelopes to the six (6) 13-16-years old whose parents provided a snail mail address. Two (2) of these returned a response.

To maximise response, the researcher sent out numerous reminders to the consenting parents and to the student email addresses in hand.

Participants assented to respond to the one-time 10-15 minute-questionnaire (Appendix 2), further to parental/guardian consent (Appendix 3).

Respective authorities authorised data collection in 3 state schools, 16 Church schools, and 2 independent schools, i.e., a total of 21 schools – 19 in Malta and 2 in Gozo.

A total of 522 parents / guardians consented to the participation of their child/ren in the study and provided the email address of their child/ren<sup>4</sup>.

By the end of the data collection phase, 245 youths of ages 13-16 had responded to the questionnaire.

**Table 1. Sample and population**

Socio-demographics		Population	% of the population	Sample	% of the sample	Moe +/- 95%
<b>13-16-years-old, Malta &amp; Gozo (grand total)</b>		17,686	100.0	245	100.0	<b>6.2</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Males</b>	9,197	52.0	110	44.9	9.3
	<b>Females</b>	8,487	48.0	96	39.2	9.9
	<b>Non-binary / prefer not to say</b>	N/A	N/A	8	3.3	N/A
<b>Age</b>	<b>13 years old</b>	4,384	24.8	56	22.9	11.2
	<b>14 years old</b>	4,520	25.6	109	44.5	8.1
	<b>15 years old</b>	4,483	25.3	64	26.1	10.6
	<b>16 years old</b>	4,242	24.0	12	4.9	24.1
<b>Type of school</b>	<b>State schools</b>	9,879	55.9	21	8.6	21.2
	<b>Church school</b>	5,995	33.9	212	86.5	6.3
	<b>Independent schools</b>	1,812	10.2	12	4.9	17.1

The researcher managed and stored all data in confidence and in compliance with GDPR and pertinent legislation, separate from any records that could make participants identifiable or traceable, using password-protected and encrypted modalities.

<sup>4</sup> A small minority of parents/guardians provided the email address of more than one child; 6 parents/guardians provided a snail mail address, to which the printed Maltese and English language versions of the questionnaire were sent with postage paid, self-addressed envelope.

**Table 1. Sample and population**

Socio-demographics		Population	% of the population	Sample	% of the sample	Moe +/- 95%
Region of residence	Southern Harbour	2,941	16.6	35	14.3	12.3
	Northern Harbour	4,907	27.7	64	26.1	10.9
	South-eastern	2,969	16.8	46	18.8	10.7
	Western	2,370	13.4	31	12.7	11.9
	Northern	3,203	18.1	39	15.9	12.0
	Gozo & Comino	1,239	7.0	14	5.7	13.3

Table 1 shows the sample distributions and pertinent margins of error in relation to the population of interest.

Table 1 shows that consideration of the findings of the study needs to consider an overall margin of error of +/-6.2%.

Although margins of error for specific cohorts of participants were higher than this, they never exceeded 29%, which is in line with good statistical research practice<sup>5</sup>.

## 4.5. Data analysis tools

The researcher used Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse the quantitative data.

The researcher deployed descriptive analysis to identify frequencies and trends;

and bivariate analysis and chi-square testing to investigate any statistically significant differences when colliding responses.

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned earlier, the NSO publishes findings when the margin of error does not exceed 29%. Additionally, it does not publish any counts (i.e., responses to specific questions) that are less than 20 (Methodology Unit, National Statistics Office (Malta), email communication, April 7, 2016).



## 4.6. Ethical considerations

The researcher safeguarded research participants by:

1. Developing and administering information letters, consent forms and an asset clause integrated in the questionnaire template (Appendix 2);
2. Submitting the research design, data collection tools, data management plan and all supporting documentation to the University of Malta Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (FREC);
3. Guaranteeing and adopting measures to honour confidentiality, limited, encrypted and password-protected data management and pseudonymisation at source; and
4. Maximising participation by using teen-friendly versions of the data collection tool, developed in Maltese and English language versions (Appendix 2), and by using print-post-return versions of the data collection tool with self-addressed, postage paid facilities to the six (6) teens whose parents provided only a snail mail address (two responses were eventually received).

### Methodological limitations and mitigating measures

The study yielded a total of 245 responses from youth of ages 13-16 years residing in Malta and Gozo at the time of the study, i.e., an overall margin of error of  $\pm 6.2\%$ <sup>6</sup>.

Albeit this is considered as acceptable, it is to be noted that the margin of error for certain cohorts of respondents was higher, e.g.,  $\pm 24.1\%$  for representation from 16-years-old – highly likely due to the study taking place at a time when they need to focus on O'Level/SEC examinations that determines post-secondary education – and  $\pm 21.2\%$  for students hailing from state schools, possibly due to fatigue from research taking place in state secondary schools.

To boost responses the researcher developed user-friendly procedures for all concerned. The researcher also sent numerous reminders to all concerned (Heads, consenting

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<sup>6</sup> This is in line with national standards and positions on good practices, e.g., the National Statistics Office (NSO, Malta) publishes findings when the margin of error does not exceed 29%. Additionally, it does not publish any counts (i.e., responses to specific questions) that are less than 20 (Methodology Unit, National Statistics Office (Malta), email communication, April 7, 2016).

parents, and students via email addresses provided by parents); whilst keeping study sustainable in terms of timeframes, human and material resources available.

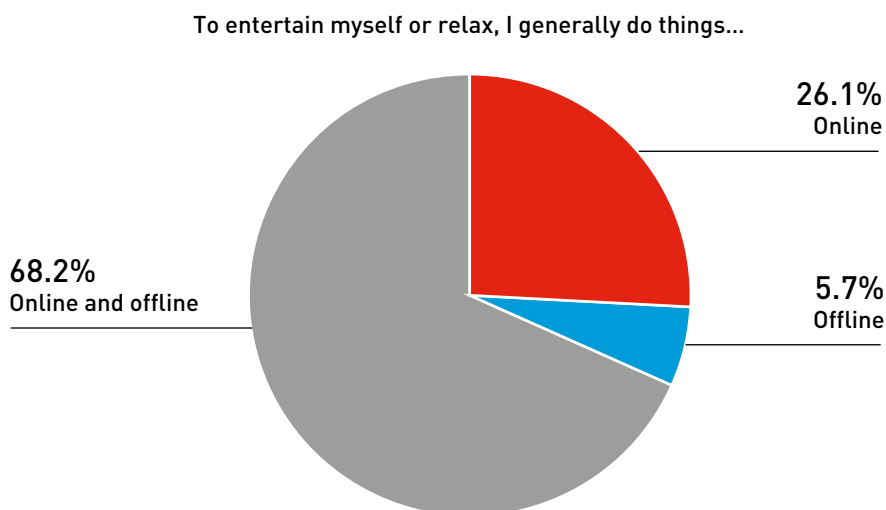
Some respondents did not provide all the requested data, e.g., in the questionnaire. However, these cases were very few.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Trends

Most respondents (68.2%, 167 respondents) declared they entertain themselves or relax by spending time online and offline, i.e., a combination (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Entertainment or relaxation modalities



Only a small minority (5.7%, 14 respondents) stated they entertain themselves or relax doing things offline (i.e., not online); whilst 26.1% (64 respondents) stated they entertain themselves or relax doing things online (i.e., not offline) (Figure 1).

Further testing revealed the only variables that yielded a statistically significant difference between the responses of different cohorts of respondents to the above question comprised age cohort (p-value 0.012, Table 2) and household composition (p-value 0.009, Table 2).

<i>Table 2. Socio-demographics and entertainment or relaxation</i>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Gender	0.184
Age cohort	0.012
School type	0.345
Region of residence	0.396
Household composition	0.009

More specifically, entertaining oneself or relaxing both online and offline (as opposed to offline only OR online only) was more prevalent among 13-14-year-old respondents (Table 3).

<i>Table 3. Age cohort and entertainment or relaxation</i>				
<b>Age cohort</b>	<b>Online</b>	<b>Offline</b>	<b>Online and offline</b>	<b>Totals</b>
13-14	51	9	104	160
15-16	10	5	61	76
<b>Totals</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>240</b>

$$\chi^2 (2, N = 240) = 8.826, p = .012$$

<i>Table 4. Household and entertainment or relaxation</i>					
<b>To entertain myself or relax, I generally do things...</b>		<b>Online</b>	<b>Offline</b>	<b>Online and offline</b>	<b>Totals</b>
	<b>with 1 guardian ONLY</b>	7	0	5	12
	<b>with 2 or more adults</b>	27	10	58	95
	<b>with 1 or more siblings &amp; 1 guardian</b>	1	1	9	11
	<b>with 1 or more siblings &amp; 2 guardians</b>	29	3	95	127
<b>Totals</b>		<b>64</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>245</b>

$$\chi^2 (6, N = 245) = 17.020, p = .009$$

Entertaining oneself or relaxing offline (only) emerged as significantly under-represented among all respondents, irrespective of household composition (Table 4).

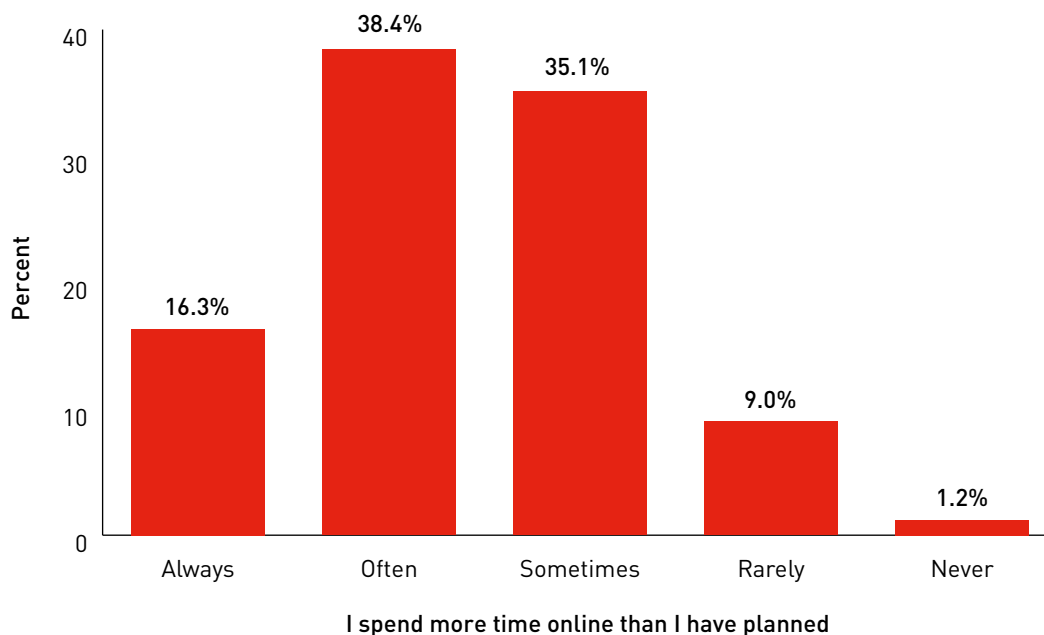
A combination of online and offline entertainment and relaxation emerged as most prevalent among those who live with 2 guardians and 1 or more siblings, particularly when compared to those who live with 2 or more adults (i.e., do not have minor siblings) (Table 4).

Also, among those who live with 2 guardians and 1 or more siblings, those who entertain or relax doing things both online and offline are far more prevalent than those who generally entertain themselves or relax online (only) and offline (only) (Table 4).

When asked whether they spend more time online than planned, “often” (38.4%, 94 respondents) and “sometimes” (35.1%, 86 respondents) prevailed among the responses. “Never” received the least number of responses (1.2%, 3 respondents). Less than one-fifth of participants (40 respondents, 16.3%) said this always happens (Figure 2).

Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 5).

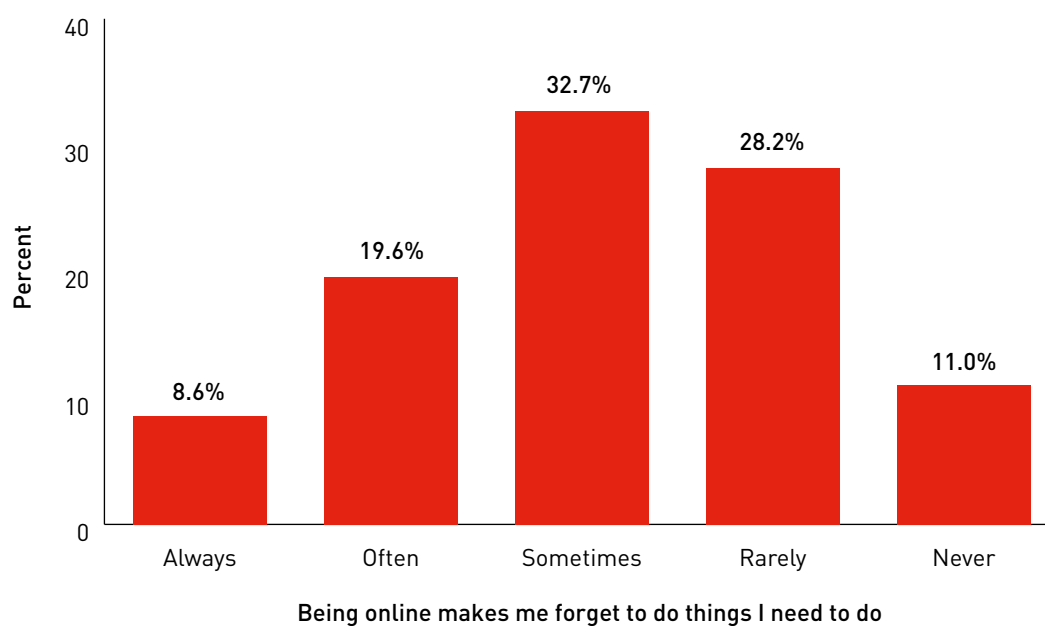
**Figure 2.** Time planned vs time spent



**Table 5. Time planned vs. time spent**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.454
Age cohort	0.341
School type	0.731
Region of residence	0.471
Household composition	0.383

When asked whether they forget things they need to do when being online, 21 respondents (8.6%) said “always”, 48 respondents (19.6%) said “often”, 80 respondents (32.7%, the largest share) said “sometimes”, 69 respondents (28.2%) said “rarely”, and 27 respondents (11.0%, the smallest share) said “never” (Figure 3).

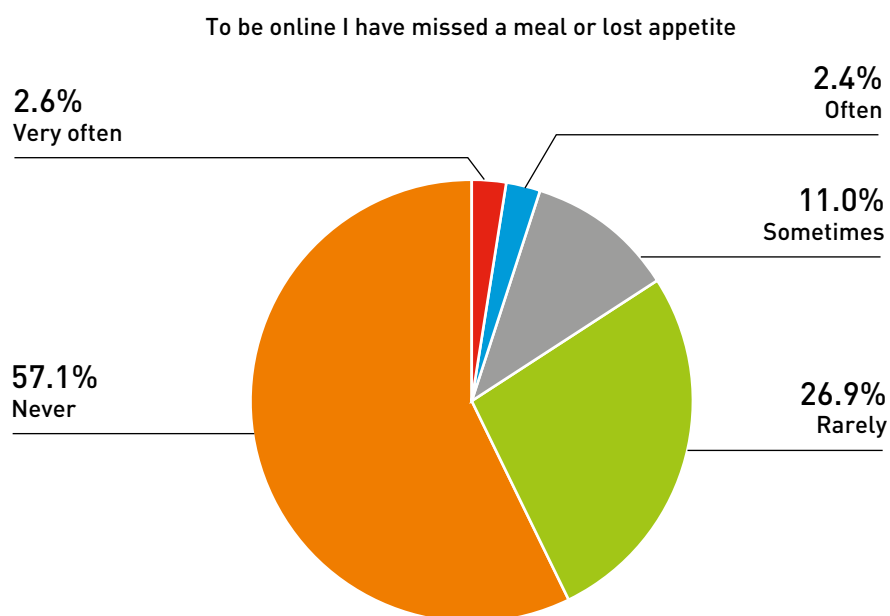
**Figure 3.** Being online and forgetting things to do

Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 6).

**Table 6. Socio-demographics, being online and forgetting things to do**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.113
Age cohort	0.402
School type	0.141
Region of residence	0.108
Household composition	0.342

When asked whether they missed a meal or lost appetite to be online, 27 respondents (11.0%) said “sometimes”, 66 respondents (26.9%) said “rarely”, and 140 respondents (57.1%, the largest share) said “never”. The smallest shares of respondents (2.4%, 6 respondents) stated “very often” and “often” (Figure 4).

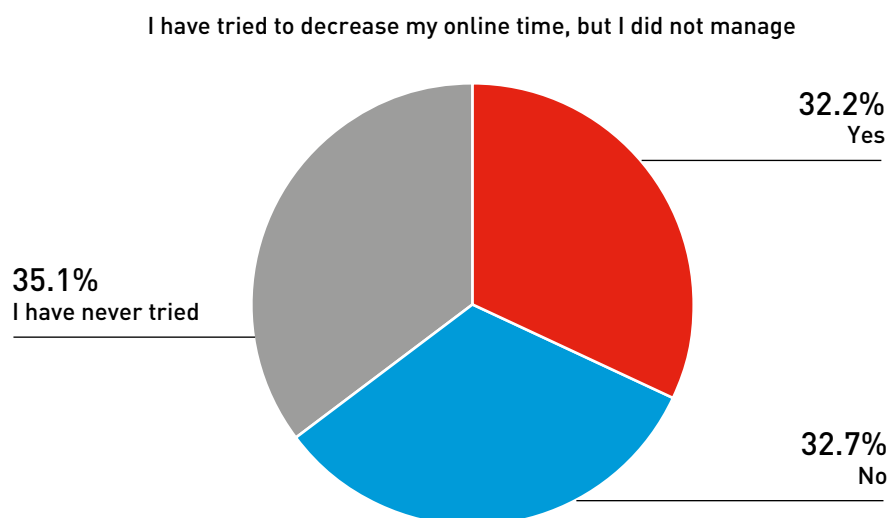
**Figure 4.** Being online and missing a meal or losing appetite

Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 7).

**Table 7. Socio-demographics, missing a meal or losing appetite**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.582
Age cohort	0.897
School type	0.344
Region of residence	0.962
Household composition	0.765

The analysis revealed comparable shares of responses to the question about trying to decrease time online but not managing. Specifically, 86 respondents (35.1%, the largest share) replied they never tried; 79 respondents (32.2%) replied “yes” (i.e., they tried reducing time online but did not manage), and 80 respondents (32.7%) replied “no” (i.e., implying they tried reducing time online and succeeded (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Not managing to decrease time online

Further testing revealed the gender of respondents impacted the responses to this question in a statistically significant manner ([p-value 0.026<sup>7</sup>, Table 8).

<sup>7</sup> p-value 0.026 when including non-binary and those who replied “prefer not to say” (Table X); p-value 0.003 when excluding the 8 responses of those who stated “non-binary” or “prefer not to say” when asked about gender.

**Table 8. Socio-demographics and not managing to decrease time online**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.026
Age cohort	0.921
School type	0.475
Region of residence	0.071
Household composition	0.393

More specifically, the number of males who responded “no” to this question (47 male respondents) is more than double the number of females (21 female respondents) (Table X). This infers males who tried reducing time online have been significantly more successful than females who tried reducing time online (Table 9).

This is confirmed by the gender gap existing between those who replied “yes”, where females (40 female respondents) amount to nearly twice as much as males (27 male respondents) (Table X).

This infers females have been less successful than males when trying to reduce time online.

No significant gender difference emerged among those who never tried to reduce time online.

**Table 9. Gender and not managing to reduce time online**

Gender		Male	Female	Non-binary	Prefer not to say	Totals
<b>I have tried to decrease my online time, but I did not manage</b>	<b>Yes</b>	27	40	1	2	70
	<b>No</b>	47	21	1	0	69
	<b>I have never tried</b>	36	35	1	3	75
<b>Totals</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>214</b>

$\chi^2(6, N = 214) = 14.356, p = .026$

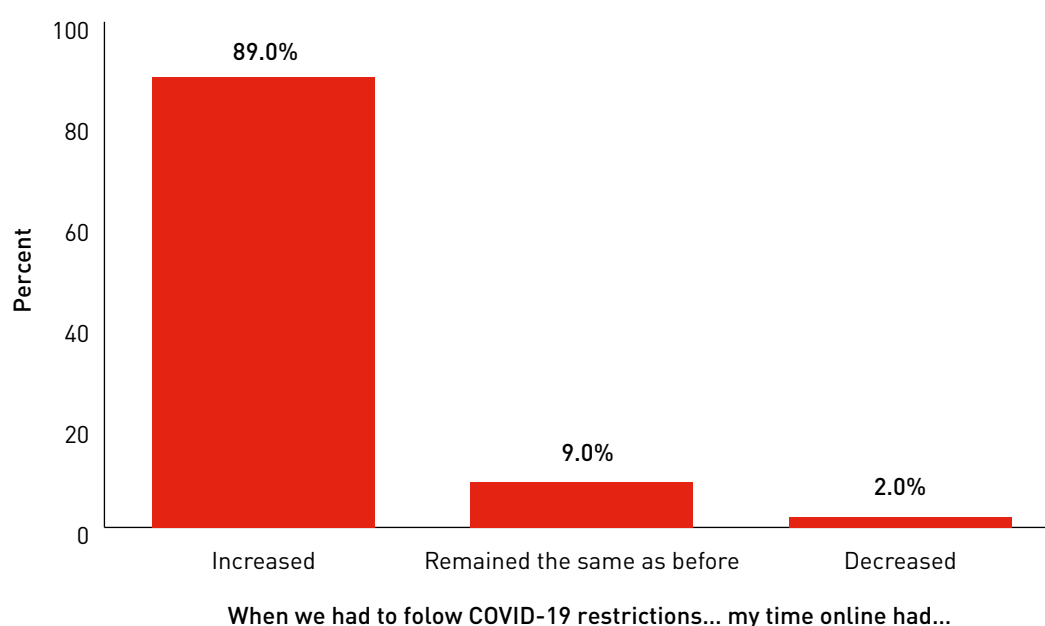
When asked whether they missed a meal or lost appetite to be online, 27 respondents (11.0%) said “sometimes”, 66 respondents (26.9%) said “rarely”, and 140 respondents (57.1%, the largest share) said “never”.



The questionnaire also asked respondents to self-assess their logging in/off routines in the light of the relatively recent COVID-19 experience and related restrictions to in-person interactions.

When asked whether time online increased, decreased or remained the same as before when COVID-19 restrictions were in place, a very small minority (5 respondents, 2.0%) said it decreased, whilst the vast majority (218 respondents, 89.0%) said it increased, and 22 respondents (9.0%) said it remained the same as before (Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Time online pre- and during COVID-19 restrictions

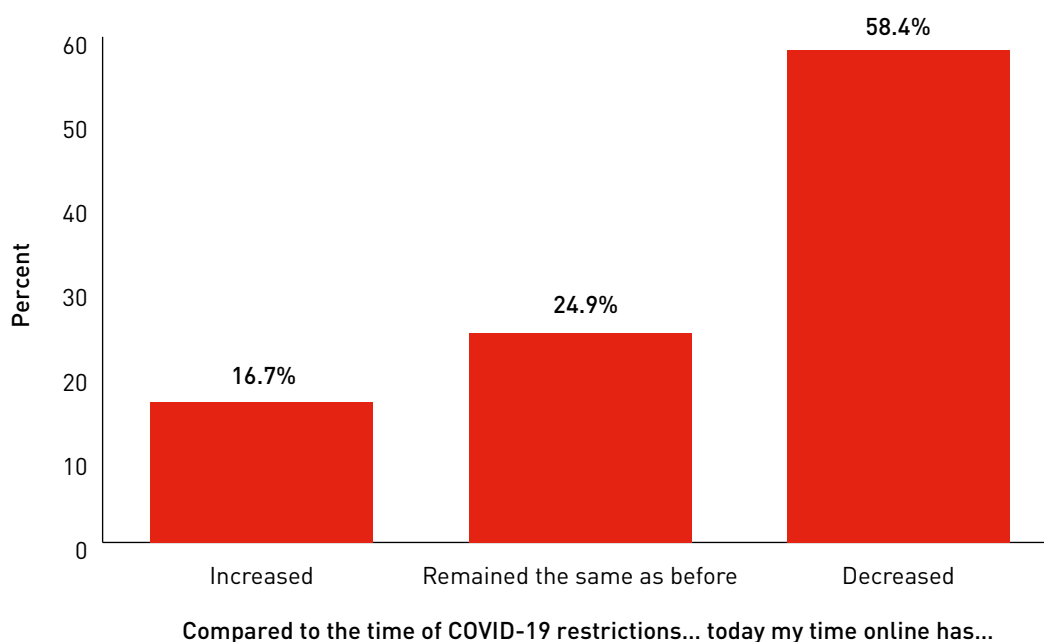


Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 10).

<i>Table 10. Socio-demographics and time online pre- and during COVID-19 restrictions</i>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Gender	0.121
Age cohort	0.305
School type	0.544
Region of residence	0.717
Household composition	0.137

When asked whether presently, their time online increased, decreased or remained the same as before compared to when COVID-19 restrictions were in place, most respondents (143 respondents, 58.4%) stated it decreased, 61 respondents (24.9%) stated it remained the same, and 41 respondents (16.7%) stated it increased (Figure 7).

**Figure 7.** Time online today vs. time of COVID-19 restrictions

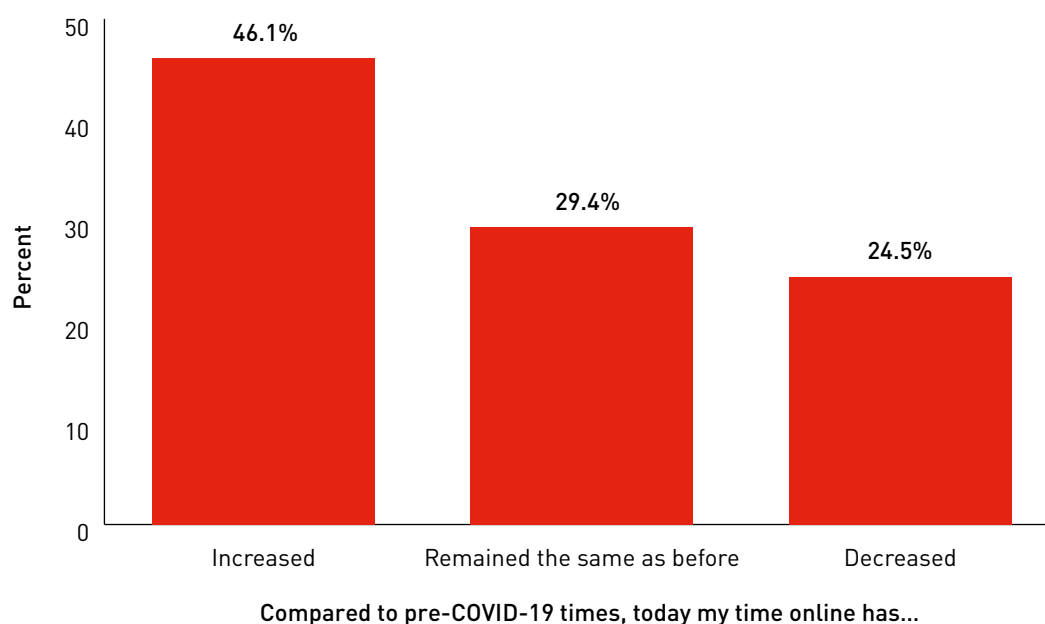


Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 11).

**Table 11. Socio-demographics and time online today vs. time of COVID-19 restrictions**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.182
Age cohort	0.348
School type	0.880
Region of residence	0.825
Household composition	0.886

When asked whether presently, their time online increased, decreased or remained the same as before compared to the times preceding COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the largest share of responses (113 responses, 46.1%) flagged an increase, 72 responses (24.4%) indicated it remained the same, and 60 responses (24.5%) flagged a decrease (Figure 8).

**Figure 8.** Time online today vs. time preceding COVID-19 pandemic restrictions

Further testing revealed the gender of the respondents was the only socio-demographic variable (among those known) that impacted the responses to this question in a statistically significant manner (p-value 0.018, Table 11).

**Table 11. Socio-demographics and time online today vs. times preceding COVID-19 pandemic restrictions**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.001
Age cohort	0.863
School type	0.109
Region of residence	0.155
Household composition	0.858

More specifically, males prevailed amongst those whose time online decreased since the times of pre-pandemic restrictions, females prevailed amongst those whose time online increased since the time of pre-COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (Table 12).

8 p-value 0.001 when including non-binary and those who replied "prefer not to say" (Table 12); p-value  $\leftarrow$  0.001 when excluding the 8 responses of those who stated "non-binary" or "prefer not to say" when asked about gender.

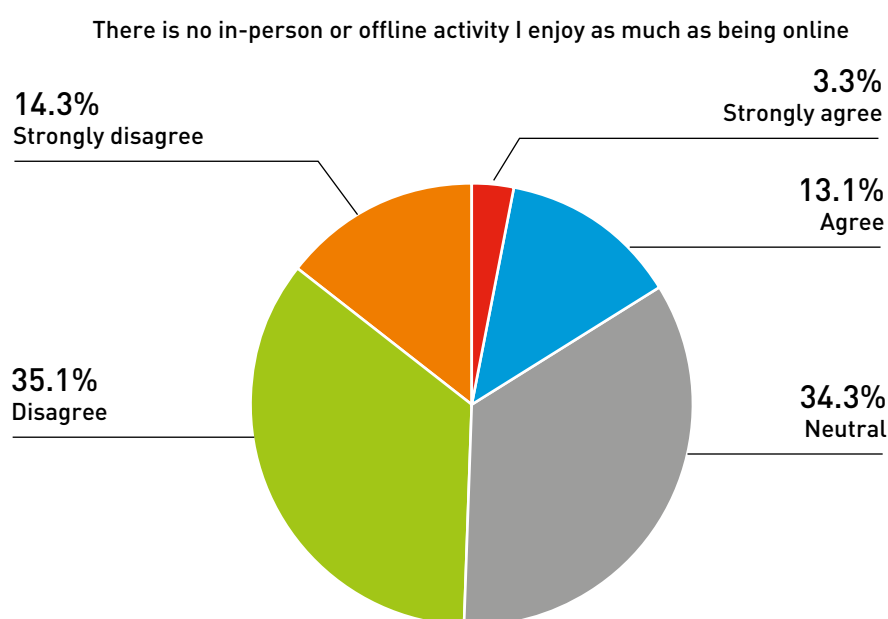
**Table 12. Gender and time online today vs. times preceding COVID-19 pandemic restrictions**

Gender	Male	Female	Non-binary	Prefer not to say	Totals
Increased	40	61	0	2	103
Remained the same as before	36	21	2	3	62
Decreased	34	14	1	0	49
<b>Totals</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>214</b>

$\chi^2 (6, N = 214) = 22.021, p = .001$

## 5.2. Attitudes

**Figure 9. Enjoyment**



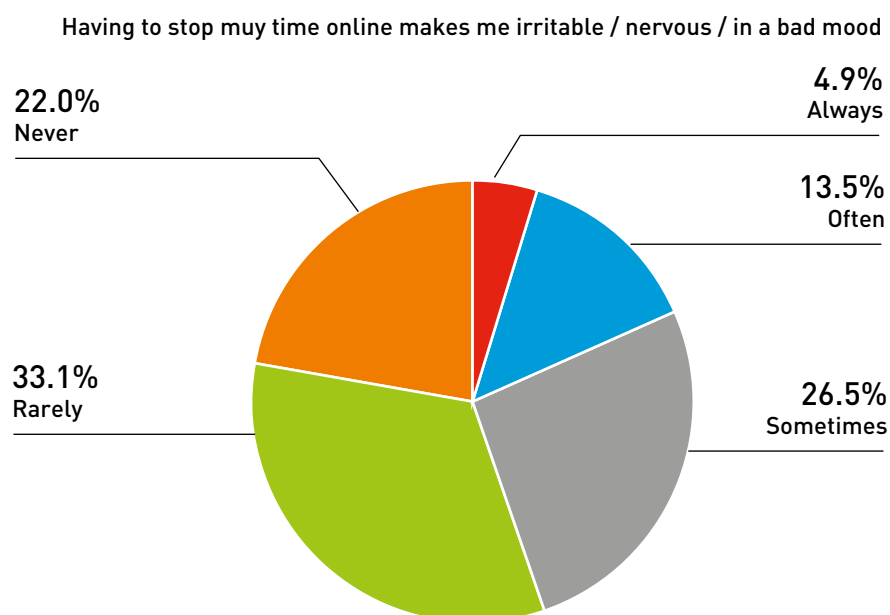
Respondents who disagreed (86 respondents, 35.1%) with the statement “There is no in-person or offline activity I enjoy as much as being online” slightly outnumbered those saying they felt neutral about this statement (84 respondents, 34.3%). Very few respondents (8 respondents, 3.3%) strongly agreed with this statement (Figure 9).

Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 13).

**Table 13. Socio-demographics and enjoyment**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.724
Age cohort	0.324
School type	0.241
Region of residence	0.909
Household composition	0.183

When asked whether stopping time online makes respondents irritable, nervous or in a bad mood, 12 respondents (4.9%, the smallest share) said “always”, 33 respondents (13.5%) said “often”, 65 respondents (26.5%) said “sometimes”, 81 respondents (33.1%, the largest share) said “rarely”, and 54 respondents (22.0%) said “never” (Figure 10).

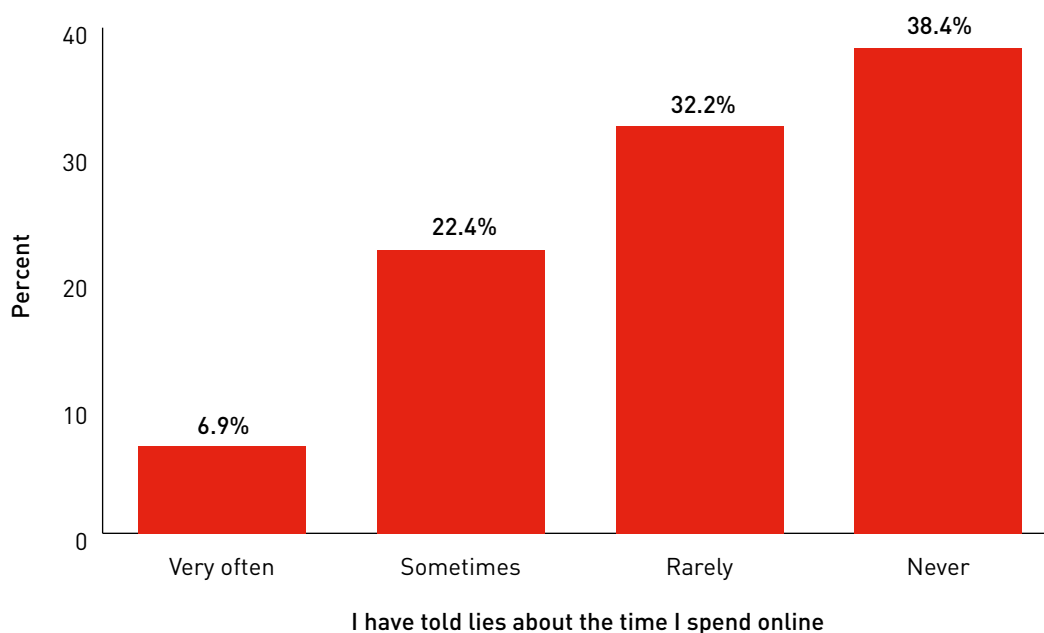
**Figure 10.** Responses to stopping time online

Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 14).

**Table 14. Socio-demographics and responses to stopping time online**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.169
Age cohort	0.114
School type	0.436
Region of residence	0.938
Household composition	0.891

When asked whether they have told lies about the time they spend online 17 respondents (6.9%, the smallest share) said “very often”, 55 respondents (22.4%) said “sometimes”, 79 respondents (32.2%) said “rarely”, and 94 respondents (38.4%, the largest share) said “never” (Figure 11).

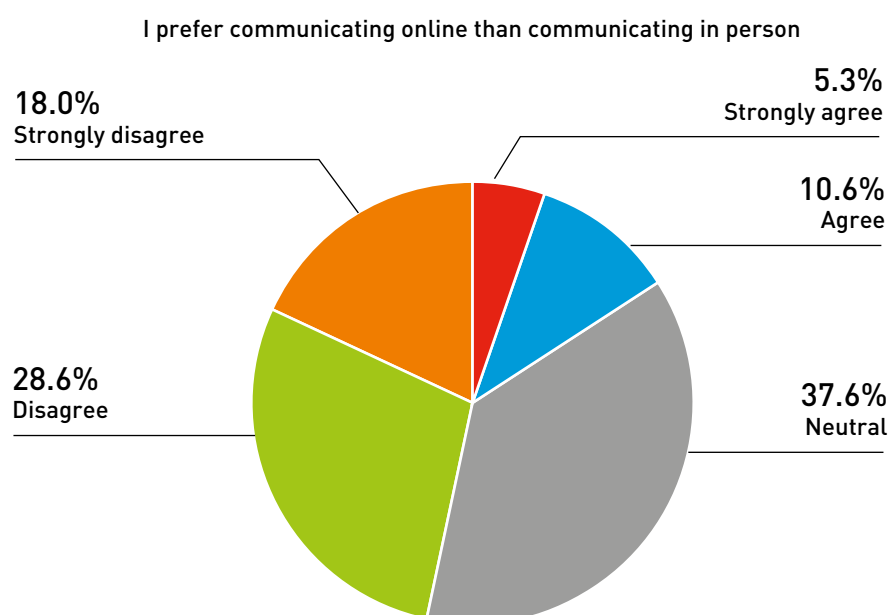
**Figure 11.** Lies about time spent online

Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 15).

**Table 15. Socio-demographics and lies about time spent online**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.414
Age cohort	0.449
School type	0.402
Region of residence	0.802
Household composition	0.307

When asked whether they prefer communicating online than in person, 13 respondents (5.3%, the smallest share) strongly agreed, 26 respondents (10.6%) agreed, 92 respondents (37.6%, the largest share) neither agreed nor disagreed, 70 (28.6%, the second largest share) disagreed, and 44 respondents (18.0%) strongly disagreed (Figure 12).

**Figure 12.** Prefer communicating online than in person**Table 16. Socio-demographics and preference for communicating online**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.563
Age cohort	0.994
School type	0.126
Region of residence	0.573
Household composition	0.028

Further testing revealed only household composition impacted the responses to this question (-value 0.028, Table 16).

More specifically, respondents who disagreed with this statement, and (albeit to a lesser extent) who strongly disagreed, prevailed among those hailing from households with 2 guardians and 1 or more siblings.

Additionally, those who disagreed and (albeit to a lesser extent) strongly disagreed, prevailed among those hailing from households with 2 guardians and 1 or more siblings – particularly when compared to how 13-16-year-old participants living with 2 or more adults (i.e., without siblings) rated this statement.

Those who neither agreed nor disagreed prevailed among 13-16-year-old participants living with 2 or more adults (Table 17).

**Table 17. Household composition and preference for communicating online**

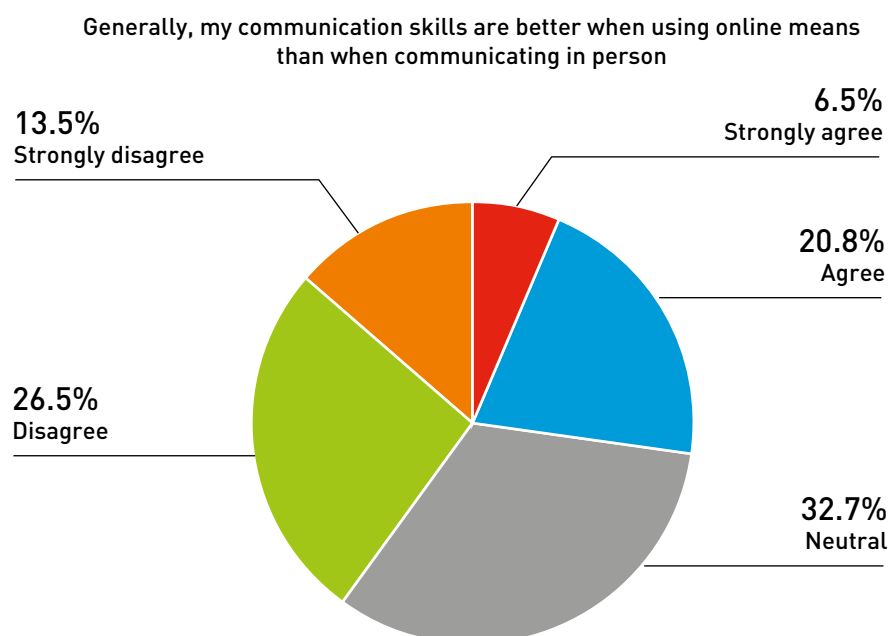
Household	With 1 guardian ONLY	With 2 or more adults	With 1 or more siblings & 1 guardian	With 1 or more siblings & 2 guardians	Totals
Strongly agree	0	7	1	5	13
Agree	1	11	2	12	26
Neutral	3	44	4	41	92
Disagree	2	17	2	49	70
Strongly disagree	6	16	2	20	44
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>245</b>

$\chi^2 (12, N = 245) = 22.959, p = .028$



### 5.3. Assessments

**Figure 13.** Self-assessment: online and in person communication skills



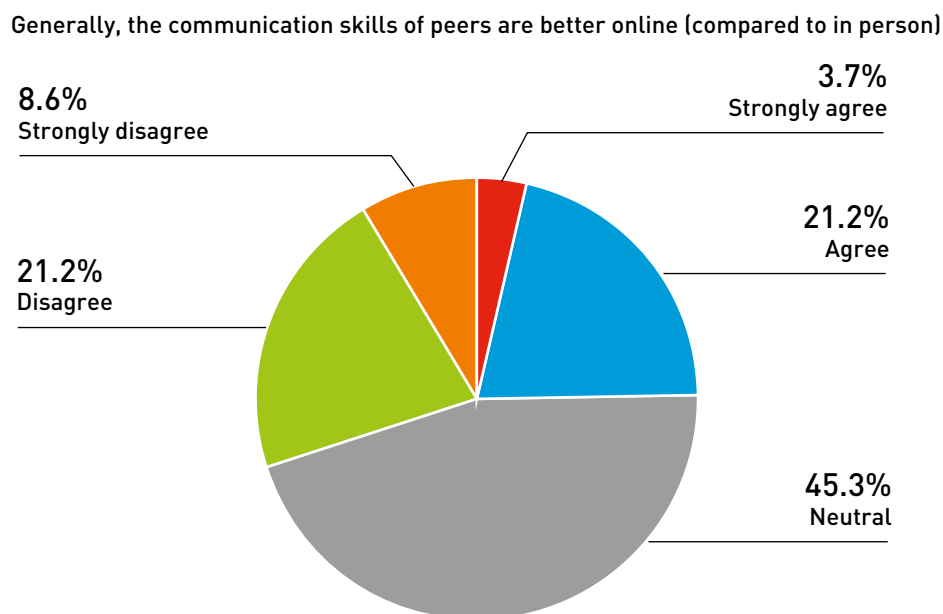
When asked to assesses their own online and in person communication skills, 16 respondents (6.5%, the smallest share) strongly agreed their online communication skills are better than their in-person communication skills, 51 respondents (20.8%) agreed, 80 respondents (32.7%, the largest share) neither agreed nor disagreed, 65 (26.5%, the second largest share) disagreed, and 33 respondents (13.5%) strongly disagreed (Figure 13).

Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 18).

<i>Table 19. Socio-demographics and communication skills self-assessment</i>	
<b>Variable</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Gender	0.504
Age cohort	0.693
School type	0.647
Region of residence	0.102
Household composition	0.388

When asked to assess their peers' online and in person communication skills, 9 respondents (3.7%, the smallest share) strongly agreed their peers' online communication skills are better, 52 respondents (21.2%) agreed, 111 respondents (45.3%, the largest share) neither agreed nor disagreed, 52 (21.2%) disagreed, and 21 respondents (8.6%) strongly disagreed (Figure 14).

**Figure 14.** Assessment of peers' online and in person communication skills



Further testing revealed none of the known socio-demographic variables impacted the responses to this question (Table 19).

**Table 19. Socio-demographics and communication skills self-assessment**

Variable	p-value
Gender	0.500
Age cohort	0.868
School type	0.563
Region of residence	0.414
Household composition	0.887

**Table 20. Socio-demographics and communication skills self-assessment**

Other things I would like to say about my online presence are...		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Responded	expressed limitations to ability to log off	15	6.1	28.8	28.8
	did not express limitations to ability to log off	37	15.1	71.2	100.0
	Total	52	21.2	100.0	
Did not respond		193	78.8		
<b>Total</b>		<b>245</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

When asked to add any other information about their online presence, only a total of 52 respondents answered the question. Out of these a very small minority (15 respondents, 6.1%, Table 20) provided information somehow relatable to limitations to the ability to log off. These responses are reported below:

“We are having too much online presence.”

“I like technology and covid made me more addicted because we stayed inside a lot.”

“Li nkun nista’ nnaqqas il- in milli nkun online (That I would be able to decrease my online time).”

“Even though I know it is bad for my mental and a strain to my eyes, I still continue to use devices.”

“Online activities are taking over.”

“I am very active and find it hard to put my phone down when I have nothing to do.”

“I tend to procrastinate more when watching longer videos (1 hour).”

“Ever since covid due to online lesson and being away from friends everyone started using online chats which go addictive.”

“I sometimes open up addictive social media apps like TikTok and spend more time than I’d have liked to on them but it’s nothing major - maybe 10 minutes.”

“It has improved, but it is not the same as it was before Covid.”

“I prefer to be offline because I know that there are many experiences to enjoy, but at times it gets hard to stop.”

“I get very nervous and angry.”

“I don’t know how to decrease my time online.”

“Sometimes it can be very addictive...”

“I try to limit myself as much as possible, but it is hard with how today’s society is.”

## 6. Conclusion

This report presented the findings of a quantitative research study on the use of Internet by 13-16-years-old in Malta and Gozo that focused on gauging online and offline routines, evidence of problematic Internet use, and the use of Internet by 13-16-years-old in Malta and Gozo in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

This study formed part of the broader *Logging Off 2022-2023* initiative commissioned and funded by Fundación MAPFRE. Data collection took place between April and June 2023, using a quantitative questionnaire.

A total of 245 youths of ages 13 to 16 years participated in this study. Consideration of findings and conclusions needs to factor the overall margin of error of +/-6.2%, and that the least represented cohorts of participants included youth aged 16 years and youths attending state schools.

## 6.1. Main findings

Most respondents admitted to spending more time online than planned on a regular basis, and that being online makes them forget to do things they need to do. Around two-thirds of the respondents stated they always, often, or sometimes become irritable, nervous, or in a bad mood when they must stop time online.

A very small minority strongly agreed to assessing their online communication skills as better than their in-person communication skills. However, less than half of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with assessing their online communication skills as better than their in-person communication skills. The largest share of responses (one-third) expressed neutral views about this.

Compared to when COVID-19 restrictions were in place, most respondents stated their time online decreased. However, more than one-third stated it remained the same or that it increased. The study showed these are generalised experiences among 13-16-years-old participating in this study, because further testing revealed no significant difference between respondents of different genders, age cohorts, hailing from different regions and household settings, and attending different types of schools. The largest share of responses flagged an increase of time online at the time of this study compared to time online in pre-pandemic times. Notably, further scrutiny revealed such increase prevailed among females in a statistically significant manner. Additionally, among those who tried reducing time online but did not manage, females were more prevalent.

Notwithstanding, the study yielded some evidence of logging off routines within the cohort under study; Indeed, logging off emerged as being more part of the routine of 13-16-years-old living with more than one adult, particularly when other siblings are involved. Living with two guardians and siblings also impacted disagreement with preferring online communication to in-person communication in a statistically significant manner.

The cumulative percentage of respondents who self-assessed their online communication skills as generally better than their in-person communication skills is lower than those who disagreed or strongly disagreed to this. Albeit to a lesser degree, it was also the case that more participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that peers communicate better when they use online means (as opposed to in-person). The latter two findings can be generalised to all 13-16-years-old participating in this study, because further testing revealed no significant difference between respondents of different genders, age cohorts, hailing from different regions and household settings, and attending different types of schools.

## 6.2. Limitations

The quantitative design of this study limited the extent of scrutiny into subjective feelings and mindsets, and related nuances.

The number of responses attained could have been higher with resources to invest in trained research officers administering the questionnaire online or in paper at the respective schools.

Such limitations need to be considered when investing in future research initiatives.

## 6.3. Implications and recommendations

Whereas the 2017 study focused on problematic Internet use and had found “a prevalence of one of the younger cohorts under investigation (14-years old) among problematic users” (PFWS, 2017, p.4), this study focused on logging off, and its findings manifest a more diversified context, with some findings being more valid for females as opposed to males, others for 15-16 years-old as opposed to 13-14 years old, others for those who have siblings, as opposed to those who live with adults only – as explained in the earlier sections of this report.

A qualitative research follow-up study could be useful to shed light on more subjective experiences, feelings, and nuances; as well as offer the opportunity to validate the main findings of this study.

A biennial research initiative would be useful to gauge trends on youths’ online and offline engagement over time.

Initiatives targeting a mix between online and offline routines into the lives of 13-16-years-old in Malta and Gozo should be particularly targeted at how such routines can be maintained when the teen reaches the 15-16-years-old’ cohort<sup>9</sup>. They should also be designed to particularly motivate 13-14-years-old living with adults only.

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<sup>9</sup> In considering this recommendation one needs to factor in that 16-years-old were under-represented in the study, as explained earlier in this report.

Findings of the study suggest further research on and investment in initiatives meant to support 13-16-years-old who are trying to decrease time online should give special attention to gender-differentiation to minimise the risk of gender gaps in successful outcomes.

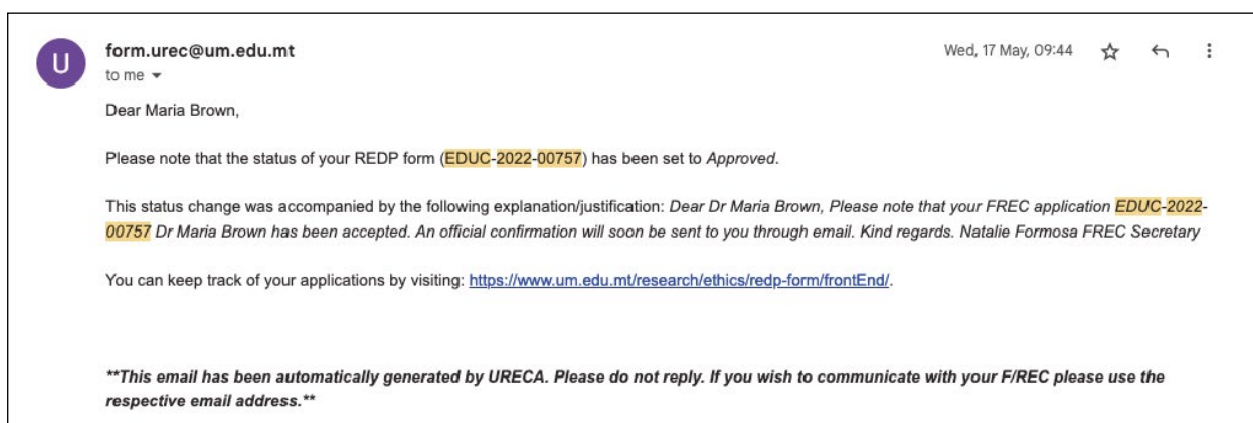
Further research needs to investigate assessment of online and in-person communication skills (including self-assessment), with the aim to inform policies and initiatives that target bridging any gaps between online and in-person communication skills.

## 7. Reference

The National Centre for Freedom from Addictions. (2017). The prevalence of Problematic Internet Use in Malta among young persons aged 13–16 years: A quantitative research study. Malta, San Anton Palace: The President’s Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

## 8. Appendices

### 8.1. Appendix 1 Authorisation from FREC



## 8.2. Questionnaire template

Hi! My name is Maria Brown and I am a sociologist.

I study how persons act in society, how they relate to one another, how groups of people make 'things' happen in society, such as families, laws and the media – but are also affected by them!

Thank you for your interest in participating in the *Logging Off* questionnaire study.

This study is commissioned by Fundación MAPFRE. This is a Spanish non-profit organisation, established in 1975, with the goal of contributing to the welfare of citizens and society. Today, Fundación MAPFRE is represented in Malta and it requested to carry out this study using a questionnaire on how 13-16 years-old in Malta and Gozo use the Internet, and related experiences.

Answering the questions and submitting the questionnaire will take you approximately 10-15 minutes.

Questions marked with \* will need to be answered for the system to allow you to submit your response.

There is no correct or incorrect answer. Answer in the way you consider best represents your situation.

The questions will not ask you to reveal name, surname or home address.

You can refuse or quit participation at any point and without consequence.

Your response will be stored in a secure password-protected and encrypted manner and used in line with regulations and legislation in Malta (e.g., GDPR).

The above means your participation is voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

Please note I am duty bound to share with the respective Authorities any information provided in your response that augs the illegal acts or abuse.

If you need help with filling the questionnaire or have any questions about participating in this study, contact me at any time on +356 9940 4820, or via email on [mbrown1919@gmail.com](mailto:mbrown1919@gmail.com)

You can also reach out to me directly using the above contacts, or to your Head of School, to know more about the results of this study.

If you have worries that are more personal or you need more expert help, <https://kel-limni.com/> provides this via chat, Whatsapp, Instagram, Messenger or email, at no charge, 7 days a week and 24 hours a day.

Thank you!

Dr. Maria Brown



**\*Required**

1. Tick below to show you understood the above and would like to participate in this \* questionnaire.

*Mark only one oval.*

I understood the above and accept to participate in this questionnaire.

2. To entertain myself or relax, I generally do things... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

online (e.g., use social media, play online games, search the web, etc.)

offline, (e.g., go out, play online games, work out / do sports, sleep, etc.)

online and online

3. There is no in-person or offline activity I enjoy as much as being online. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

strongly agree

agree

neutral

disagree

strongly disagree

4. I spend more time online than I have planned. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

always

often

sometimes

rarely

never

5. Being online makes me forget to do things I need to do, e.g., homework, helping with household chores, wash, etc. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Always
- Often
- sometimes
- rarely
- never

6. To be online I have missed a meal or lost appetite. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- very often
- often
- sometimes
- rarely
- never

7. I have tried to decrease my online time, but I did not manage (so the time I spend online \* remained the same or increased).

*Mark only one oval.*

- I have never tried decreasing my time online
- I have never tried decreasing my time online but I did not manage
- I have never tried decreasing my time online and I managed

8. Having to stop my time online makes me irritable, or nervous, or in a bad mood. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- always
- often
- sometimes
- rarely
- never

9. I have told lies about the time I spend online.\*

*Mark only one oval.*

- very often
- sometimes
- rarely
- never

10. I prefer communicating online than communicating in person. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- strongly agree
- agree
- neutral
- disagree
- strongly disagree

11. Generally, my communication skills are better when using online means than when communicating in person. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- strongly agree
- agree
- neutral
- disagree
- strongly disagree

12. Generally, the communication skills of persons of my age cohort I communicate with are better when they use online means, compared to when they communicate with me in person. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- strongly agree
- agree
- neutral
- disagree
- strongly disagree

13. When we had to follow COVID-19 restrictions that limited in-person contact, my time online had... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- increased
- remained the same as before
- decreased

14. Compared to the time when COVID-19 restrictions limited in-person contact, today, my time online, has... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- increased
- remained the same
- decreased

15. Compared to pre-pandemic times, today, my time online, has... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- increased
- remained the same
- decreased

16. Other things I would like to say about my online presence are...

*Type here anything else that you would like to say about this topic. If you do not answer this question you will still be able to submit your response.*

17. I am a...: \*

*Type-in your sex/gender, e.g., male, female, boy, girl, prefer not to say, etc.*

18. By the end of the year 2023, I will be: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- 13 years old
- 14 years old
- 15 years old
- 16 years old
- Other:

19. The school I currently attend is a... \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- state school / government school
- Church school
- independent school

20. I live in.... \*

*Type-in the name if the locality you live in, e.g., Birkirkara, Qrendi, Sliema, Mellieħa, etc.*

21. I live... \*

*Tick the option that mostly represents your case, or type-in your answer in the space provided at the end of the list.*

*Mark only one oval.*

- with one parent or guardian ONLY (i.e., no one else lives with us)
- with two or more adults ONLY (e.g., I live with parents / guardians / partner of my parent / grandparents, etc. and/or any brother/s or sister/s are also adults) with one or more brother/s and/or sister/s PLUS one parent or guardian only
- with one or more brother/s and/or sister/s PLUS two or more adults (e.g., parents / guardians / partner of my parent / grandparents, etc.) in a residential home (e.g., Fra Diegu, St Patrick's, etc.)
- Other:

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### 8.3. Consent Form for Parent / Guardian



Date: Day Month Year

Dear Parent / Legal Guardian,

You are receiving this email to kindly consider consenting to the participation of your child/ren attending this school in a one-time online questionnaire as part of The Use of Internet among 13-16-years-old in Malta & Gozo: A National Study.

This study is being commissioned by the not-for-profit organisation Fundación MAPFRE. No commercial interests are involved.

To submit your consent and/or acquire more information on the study kindly click on this link: <https://forms.gle/ifsReJsteWT43Wht6>

Thank you in advance!

Head of School

---

Data: Jum Xahar Sena

Għażiż Ġenitur / Kustodju Legali,

Qed tirċievi din l-imejl sabiex ġentilment tikkonsidra l-parteciċipazzjoni tal-wild tiegħek / uliedek li jattendu din l-iskola fi kwestjonarju onlajn ta' darba, bħala parti mill-studju nazzjonali dwar l-użu tal-Internet fost dawk ta' età ta' bejn 13 u 16 -il sena f'Malta u f'Għawdex.

Dan l-istudju huwa ikkummissjonat mill-organizzazzjoni ta' volontarjat Fundación MAPFRE. M'hemm ebda interess kummerċjali.

Sabiex tagħti l-kunsens tiegħek u/jew tikseb iktar taġġirif, jekk jogħġbok żur <https://forms.gle/RtY7yzHC4FQPJbsz7>

Grazzi bil-quddiem!

Il-Kap tal-Iskola

---

Dear Parent / Guardian,

My name is Maria Brown, I am a sociologist, and I am carrying out research on behalf of Fundación MAPFRE on the use of Internet among 13-16-years-old in Malta and Gozo.

Fundación MAPFRE is a non-profit foundation, founded in Spain in 1975; currently with a branch in Malta, among other countries. It does not have commercial interests. Its goal is to contribute to the welfare of citizens and society. More information about Fundación MAPFRE can be accessed here: <https://www.fundacionmapfre.org/>

Since the Authorities governing the school sending you this notification authorised the school's participation in this study, you are invited to kindly fill-in this form to consent to your child's / children's participation in the mentioned study. If you have more than one child aged between 13 to 16 years attending the school sending you this link, you can consent to the participation of any one or more of your 13-16-years old by filling-in and submitting this form.

Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or incomplete participation will bear no consequence.

Participation would take c. 10-15 minutes and would involve your child / children responding to a one-time online questionnaire about how time online is spent and about related experiences. Questions will not ask to reveal name, surname, or home address. Submitted responses will be stored and managed using password-protected and encrypted methods, and in line with regulations and legislation in Malta (e.g., GDPR).

Only the undersigned researcher will have access to the responses. On completion of the study, Fundación MAPFRE will only receive the report on anonymised findings. The responses will be deleted one month after the submission of the final report to Fundación MAPFRE.

If you have worries that are more personal or you need more expert help, <https://kel-limni.com/> provides this via chat, Whatsapp, Instagram, Messenger or email, at no charge, 7 days a week and 24 hours a day.

The undersigned is duty bound to share with the respective Authorities any information that ags illegal acts or abuse. To kindly consent to your your child's / children's participation in this study, please ll-in and submit this form. This will result in your child's / children's receiving the link to the online questionnaire.

Further information or clari cations can be obtained by contacting the undersigned on +356 9940 4820, or via email to [mbrown1919@gmail.com](mailto:mbrown1919@gmail.com)

Eventually, to know more about the results of this study, you can also reach out to me directly using the above contacts, or to your Head of School.

Thank you!

Dr Maria Brown

**\*Required**

1. Parent's / Guardian's Surname \*
2. Parent's / Guardian's Name \*
3. Parent's / Guardian's ID Number \*
4. Parent's / Guardian's email address \*
5. Email address of Child 1 \*
6. Email address of Child 2 (if applicable)



7. Email address of Child 3 (if applicable)

8. Email address of Child 4 (if applicable)

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