

INSIGHTS ON MODERN YOUTH ACTIVISM



Case of University of Malta Students

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Foreword

Research is an important loop in ensuring that data trickles down into policy. It is only a commitment to evidence-based research that we can truly understand the complexities of the respective phenomenon. What we have attempted to do in this piece of research, that Aġenzija Żgħażaġh commissioned to the Faculty for Social Wellbeing is precisely that, gather data that can be passed on to policy makers and practitioners to bring about potential changes. 'Youth' is a phenomenon that has so many facets to it and is such a malleable phenomenon that providing on-going information is a necessity.

The notions of civic participation and the participation of youth in civil society remain important concepts that merit our reflection. It is through the role of activism that our country can establish and grow as a nation and having young people, through their 'thinking out of the box' ways, to lead the line is imperative.

My experience of collaborating with Aġenzija Żgħażaġh is always a positive one. I believe that the Faculty and Aġenzija Żgħażaġh share the ethos of being at the forefront when standing up to what they believe in. I hope that this study will be another building block in having more actively engaged young people in our communities.

Special thanks go to Anabel Cuff and Samantha Pace Gasan (RSOII) who worked hard under my guidance to make this study possible.

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi
Dean, Faculty for Social Wellbeing



Foreword

Our new national youth policy, *Towards 2030 - Reaching out to, working with, and supporting young people*, continues and further enhances the role of research and has a dedicated strategic goal aimed at conducting research on the lives of young people to ensure a knowledge based policy approach. It is envisaged that this research will include regular surveys and analysis of the everyday lives of young people as well as focused studies on particular features and aspects of young people's lives and experiences.

This study, which was undertaken by the Faculty of Social Wellbeing in the University of Malta, for Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, focuses on the important issue of youth activism. While the civic engagement and democratic participation of young people is a long standing issue it has taken on greater urgency and importance. Young people today face many challenges resulting from climate and demographic change, global health insecurity, rapid economic and social change and a revolution in technology. In many places, liberal democracy and the rule of law appear under threat, civil society undermined, and young people's confidence in those who govern them eroding. Giving a voice and listening to young people and promoting young activism to further strengthen their civic engagement and democratic participation is now more important than ever.

I am confident that this study will not only provide us with more information on youth activism in Malta but will also help us see youth activism as a means of engaging with and empowering young people.

Miriam Teuma
Chief Executive
Aġenzija Żgħażaġh



Executive Summary

The aim of the study was to provide an insight on the prevalence of youth activism, as well as understanding factors that act as motivators or barriers for such involvement. Data was collected through a convenience sample, accessed through the University of Malta (UM).

This study, conducted by researchers within the Faculty for Social Well-being, following a commission by Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ highlights a shift from traditional to a more contemporary approach to youth activism. Young people are withdrawing from formal institutions towards less structured means of activism; with social media being mostly used as a medium through which students are active.

Findings show that age, gender, post-secondary education, students' mode of attendance at UM and their type of employment demonstrate a statistically significant association with activism, contrary to other socio-demographic variables tested throughout this report; with variations on one's identity leading to different approaches towards activism.

Moreover, this report shows that amongst participants intrinsic motivators such as the willingness to bring about change and feeling strongly about a cause have a major impact on the active engagement of students. On the contrary, respondents claim that partisan politics and backlash impede their participation mostly, as they fear negative repercussions. With a lack of trust, sense of belonging and limited belief that they can actually bring about change, young people may tend to believe that they have more to lose than gain.

Two comprehensive lists of recommendations for further research or policy consideration has been included at the end of the document with the scope of providing evidence-based recommendations to enhance policy implementation and practices in the field of youth activism.



1

Introduction

Everyday across the globe, millions of people are involved in a multitude of activities that benefit their communities. Civic participation and engagement bring direct benefits to societies, but also to the individual in terms of well-being and health. People donate their time and effort as political campaigners, social activists, volunteers and in a variety of roles intended to strengthen their communities and the civil society in which they live. Their actions and activities are not merely for their own interest, but for the benefit of others (CIRCLE, 2020; United Nations, 2002). Participation is a way of giving back to one's community, and there are a number of different ways of engaging.

Traditional conduits for active civic participation comprise activities such as voting, attending political rallies, community engagement, organising in groups, forming interest groups, becoming involved in a political party (Smith, Lister, Middleton & Cox, 2005). The level of engagement itself can vary from a more passive role, such as a mere observer, to actively taking part and encouraging others to take part.

There is a fair amount of variation in the understanding of the terms in the literature, however in general engagement refers broadly to any interaction with civic, social or political issues, while participation and involvement usually denote a more active input. Activism on the other hand is a more involved form of interaction, more highly vocal and which includes overtones of recruitment or instigation as well as participation (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray & Born, 2012; Rochira et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2005). Nonetheless, the terms engagement, participation and involvement, and activism were used interchangeably throughout this document.

Engagement at any level can be divided into three main categories: political, civic and social (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Cicognani et al, 2012; Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor & Loisel, 2007). Barrett & Brunton-Smith (2014) define political participation as any activity whose aim is to directly or indirectly influence regional, national, or supranational governance, by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or the selection of individuals who make that policy. Zukin et al. (2006) characterize civic participation as any voluntary activity, undertaken on an individual basis or with others, and focused on helping others, achieving a public good or solving a community problem, in order to effect change. Social activism refers to religious, sports, community and recreational groups (Cicognani et al., 2012).

It is a commonly held view that participation and engagement are declining, and concerns that young people in particular are becoming more self-interested and less involved in civic

engagement (Norris, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Xenos et al., 2014). While on certain levels this does seem to be the case, a number of scholars have challenged this perception (Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010; Dalton, 2008; Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014; Smith et al., 2005), putting forward the argument that youths are equally as active as other generations, that it is the manner in which they are active that differs. Scholarly are increasingly alleging that today's youths are more likely to be active on non-formal and non-organisational platforms and on social media (Flanagan, 2009; Lochocki, 2010; Smith et al., 2005), as opposed to the traditional routes to engagement of protests, membership in trade unions, writing to politicians or bringing up political or civic issues in the print media (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Crocetti, Erentaitė & Žukauskienė, 2014; Pace Gasan, 2016).

A traditional view to activism gives a narrow and potentially inaccurate picture of today's realities of engagement, especially in relation to youth engagement. In recent years social networking sites have emerged as a significant channel for political and civic debate and discussion, and are increasingly becoming an important platform of social engagement, particularly for youths. Movements such as the 'Me Too' and #BlackLivesMatter or the environmental activism sparked by Greta Thunberg bear evidence to this (Anderson, Toor, Rainie & Smith, 2018). Young people are becoming increasingly socially active on platforms other than formal organisations (Smith et al, 2005; Cho, Byrne & Pelter, 2020).

In light of this, this study aimed to examine prevalent attitudes and identify motivators and barriers that influence the participation of youth in civil society, through a focus on students in tertiary education. The research questions central to this study included:

1. How are young people involved in civic participation?
2. What factors influence the participation of youth in civil society?

This report was completed by the Faculty for Social Well-being at the request of Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations to enhance policy implementation and practices in the field of youth activism. The main findings discussed derived from data collected from students enrolled within the University of Malta.

2 Literature Review

Throughout this chapter, literature focusing on civic participation, particularly youth activism and its benefits, as well as factors that influence such engagement, and barriers are discussed.

2.1 Themes and concepts

2.1.1 Engagement & Activism

In its broadest and simplest understanding, "civic engagement" is taken to signify any individual or group activity that aims to address issues of public concern (APA, 2009). While this may initially seem impossibly vast, it fundamentally means that engagement aims to improve the world as it is seen by the viewer. Hence, engaging and how one chooses to engage have specific meaning to different people in different contexts. Engagement thus comes to encompass a wide variety of actions and behaviours that improve communities and help solve problems. Citizen participation is the active involvement of individuals in changing problematic conditions in communities and influencing policies and programs that affect the quality of their lives (Ohmer, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Likewise, youth activism is hugely diverse as it is a reflection of the personalities and the contexts in which they are active and the issues that move them (CIRCLE, 2020).

Activism goes beyond what is conventional or routine (Martin, 2007) and aims to effect social change through action and is concerned with achieving social, political, economic or environmental change. While activism can be led by individuals, it is usually done collectively through social movements. Although activism is generally peaceful and associated with change-oriented collective actions like strikes, demonstrations or sit-ins, it can also be more contentious or even violent for example including actions such as damage to property, sabotage to pipelines, the ruining of fur coats or riots, and at times this distinction could be blurred (Martin, 2007; Musick & Wilson, 2008, as cited in Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010, p. 18). Within the notion of activism lies an understanding that there is potential for bringing about change, that collectively or even individually the activist can challenge the status quo, make societies, governments and communities fairer and more accountable and bring about change (Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010; Martin, 2007).

2.1.2 Youth

While there is a general understanding of what youth means, there are slightly varying concepts of the parameters of the term, particularly regarding the age that should be the cut off point for youth. Although age is not the best parameter to define youth and leaves much unsaid about this formative life stage, it is a useful measure that is easy to

understand and is often used (Azzopardi, 2012). In the United States, as well as for the United Nations (UN), youth is defined as spanning ages 15-25, while in Europe Union policy it is more generally seen as being from 14 to 24 years of age. The EU Youth Strategy does not operate with an official definition for the specific period in life when a person is considered to be “young”, and indeed this definition varies from one Member State to another. In the EU, the age to consider differs with time and socio-economic development. The EU ‘Youth in Action’ programme identifies young people as those between 13 and 30, which approach was adopted by Malta for its National Youth Policy (European Commission, 2018a; Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, 2015; United Nations, 2013).

Youths are the cornerstone of any society. They are no longer children that need nurturing and looking after, yet they are not quite at the stage where they are experienced, emancipated adults making their way in the world. Since they do not have the weight of responsibilities that come with maturing adulthood, youths are free to explore various avenues and ways of being in their quest for identity formation. Youths are in that in-between formative state where the actions and the decisions they take will cement them into the adults they become and reflect in the world they create (Crocetti et al., 2014; Flanagan, 2009; Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, 2015).

Youth is a time of identity exploration and formation, where young people transition from the highly structured arenas of childhood to the greater freedom and self-determination of adolescence (Flanagan, 2009). Biological (puberty), psychological (the acquisition of formal-abstract reasoning) and sociological (the renegotiation of relationships with self, parents and peers) processes lead youths to question who they are, to ask what their place is in the world, and to examine what future they want to create for themselves. In addition, one result of adolescent brain development is that they experience vast improvements in basic cognitive abilities and logical reasoning (Poskitt & Bonney, 2016). The processing styles with which adolescents address these developments may vary the intensity with which change and identity formation takes place, however the outcome is that youths will need to carve their own place in the world (CIRCLE, 2020; Crocetti et al., 2014; Flanagan, 2009; Lannegrand-Willems, Chevrier, Perchec & Carrizales, 2018). In the process of deciding their future and finding their place in society, youths also take stock of themselves and start to formulate personal, political and civic values (Flanagan, 2009).

2.2 The Importance of Youth Activism

The European Commission reports that 53% of European youths engage in organised activities; nearly one third are active volunteers; and others support a cause through media attention or consumer choice (European Commission, 2018a). Moreover, sometimes young people express civic criticism through behaviour that may be seen to go against established societal norms, such that youths and their preoccupations may become the subject of moral panics, particularly when this narrative is taken up in the media (Rodrigo, 2012). This is especially true when the discourse centres around young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are often labelled as ‘derailed youths’, and where a lack of social engagement and political interest is seen as a cause for concern and a weakening of the fabric of society (Kaulingfreks, 2016). Yet, when young people act in

ways that might seem contrary to societal norms, this too can be a form of engagement in that their behaviour is an active manifestation of their disagreement with the status quo. These actions are also a form of seeing to belong and to shape a world that they are in disagreement with (Kaulingfreks, 2016; Welch, Price & Yankey, 2002).

Early youth is also a time when learning and education intensify. Young people are required to become increasingly self-sufficient and independent in their learning and thought processes. They begin to perceive their choices to have a weight further than who they are and what they are doing in that moment (Poskitt & Bonney, 2016). Priorities change again in late adolescents and early adulthood from achieving success in education and vocational training to establishing life goals such as setting up a career, forming personal relationships and building independent homes and families (Azzopardi, 2012; Briggs, 2008; Jowell & Park, 1998; Pace Gasan, 2016). Once these life goals are established and the young people concerned become stakeholders in society, they are more likely to engage in the political or civic issues that affect society, and which now concern them more closely (Jowell & Park, 1998). These years are significant for the formation and strengthening of civic education and the building of civic skills. Developing an ideology enables youth to organize and manage the vast array of choices the world presents (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999). Through exploration and exposure, young people build their world view and values.

Furthermore, differences influenced by the political socialisation process (Scott & Marshall, 2009) also lead to variations in participation based on gender (Briggs, 2008; European Commission, 2013; Landstedt et al., 2016). Although young women tend to be more informed about civic participation (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016), they are thought to be less interested in activism (Briggs, 2008; Cicognani et al., 2012). However, Booth-Tobin & Han (2010) found that even young women are interested in activism; yet young men tend to express their political interest more, more often expressing their activism through campaign-oriented and confrontational activities (Briggs, 2008; Cicognani et al., 2012; Electoral Commission, 2004). Additionally, there is a gender difference with regards to the cause that young men or women choose to commit to (Booth-Tobin & Han, 2010; Lawless & Fox, 2013). Intergenerational dialogue leads to the transmission of gender roles and stereotypes from one generation to the next through multiple social institutions (Scott & Marshall, 2008), with gender differences in upbringing and socialisation having implications on one’s interests, competences and abilities to engage in civil society (Cicognani et al., 2012) and therefore disabling some youth from participating fully in society.

Research shows that youth civic involvement has several benefits, both individually and at a community level (D’Agostino & Visser, 2010). Aside from the obvious immediate benefits of civic activities, such as improving political access, beach clean-ups, recycling initiatives or working to solve local problems; civic engagement is beneficial for communities in other ways (Biggs, 2019). Youth engagement is important because it encourages youths to advocate for their own concerns and interests, after all they are best placed to understand and talk about them, whereas adult agency in youth affairs may result in their specific interests not being understood and their perspectives not being taken into consideration. Additionally, as most civic issues ranging from education, employment, politics, immigration or the environment, have direct bearing on youths, by their active involvement, young people can directly influence the way these issues affect

them (CIRCLE, 2020). Moreover, societies that empower youths to effect change and be involved in decision-making are more representative and can better deliver the services and opportunities that are beneficial to youths, as a result of which, the entire community benefits (Azzopardi, 2012; Rochira et al., 2019). An integrated society where everyone is engaged is a healthy society, one that serves its inhabitants all the better by being representative of all its residents. While young people are not a single, homogeneous, group, they share certain characteristics and can bring new ideas, enthusiasm, energy and creativity to the table (CIRCLE, 2020; Wain, 2012).

People's links, associations and networks - their social capital, can be powerful drivers affecting the quality of life in a community. Civic engagement and social cohesion affect social, economic and health outcomes (National Research Council, 2014; Putnam, 2000). When youths are actively involved in solving the problems that they see with their communities, they also become more strongly attached to those communities. This enhances not only the community, but also fosters a sense of belonging among youths (Brennan et al., 2007; D'Agostino & Visser, 2010), which is one of the driving needs of humanity (Biggs, 2019). Meaningful engagement transforms the community from being merely a collective gathering place into a collection of psychological connections between its members (Pearrow, 2008).

Youth engagement, while clearly beneficial to communities, also brings numerous favourable outcomes for the youths themselves. People's active engagement in society can have beneficial effects on their quality of life long-term (Flanagan, 2009), and participation and connectedness to communities and groups both like and unlike one's own are associated with positive effects in many areas of life. Health, education, trust in institutions, compliance with the law, and personal well-being are all areas that benefit from civic participation (D'Agostino & Visser, 2010; Flanagan, 2009; National Research Council, 2014; Pancer et al., 2007).

Another advantage of active participation is that it can act to diminish the influence of background and socio-economic status, particularly for those from a lower social status. By bringing youths from diverse backgrounds together and encouraging interaction, team work and discussion, these activities are especially instrumental in enabling these youths to expand their understanding and networks as well as develop their self-esteem and a sense of their efficiency as actors in society (Flanagan, 2009; Mahoney, 2000; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Putnam, 2000). Hence, participation in supplementary activities outside of mandated learning has been found to be highly beneficial to youth civic socialisation and to encourage future political activity (McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Young people of colour and those from other minority demographics are also under represented in youth civic engagement and political participation, and youth programmes designed to provide such youths with opportunities for growth and enhancement contribute enormously to correcting this imbalance (Anderson et al., 2018; CIRCLE 2020; Pearrow, 2008; Saito, Blyth & Walker, 2006).

Civic engagement can serve as an important factor in the development of a young person's sense of identity (D'Agostino & Visser, 2010; Flanagan et al., 2007; Pearrow, 2008; Zeldin 2004;). Engaging in activities such as political action, community service, youth organizations or in music, sports or the arts, has been linked to several positive

outcomes such as better educational success, greater sense of career direction, better self-esteem and improved connectedness with others in general (D'Agostino & Visser, 2010; Pancer et al., 2007; Pancer & Pratt, 1999). Civic engagement is also seen to reduce 'problem behaviours' such as substance abuse, school dropout, criminal activities and teenage pregnancies (Landstedt et al., 2016; Mahoney, 2000; Pancer et al., 2007). Zeldin (2004) states that involving youth in their communities minimises aggressive behaviour and helps disenfranchised youths to develop the skills, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging that will help them transition successfully into adulthood. Kirshner (2007) suggests that activism helps youths find an outlet for their anger and sense of injustice, and directs them toward constructive ends, which enables them to establish points of contact with mainstream institutions. Connecting with others and the shared values and trust that arises from this human contact improves young people's health and mental well-being, through both psychological and biological processes (Putnam, 2000).

Youth activism also has relevance to the individuals' education, by giving context to their learning and bridging their academic and social spheres. Working on civic action programmes enhances academic advancement and promotes identity development by allowing youths to flex their knowledge outside lecture theatres and class rooms (Kirshner, 2007; Zeldin, 2004). Participation allows youths to get a sense of what they can achieve in groups as opposed to being on their own and strengthens their sense of community, self-worth and value to society. By shifting the focus from "me" to "the group", it creates connections with diverse groups, enhancing relations to other ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations and ages (Bandura, 1999). Engaging in activist groups also allows youths to interact with persons who embody a range of ages, skills and authority. This gives them valuable exposure not only to role models, but also to collaboration with sectors of society that they may not normally have access to, given that age segregation is the norm in their everyday experience (Bandura, 1999; Kirshner 2007; Zeldin et al., 2005). Experiencing success in these circumstances gives youths a sense of agency and fosters their leadership abilities. Brennan, Barnett, and Lesmeister (2007) reported that youth who have been empowered by the community are likely to be future leaders. Ultimately, participation by youths bestows a number of benefits towards the individual and their community, enabling them to forge identities as powerful civic actors (Bandura, 1999; Texas State, 2013).

2.3 Pathways and motivations to youth engagement

Research shows very convincingly that youths who are involved in some form of civic engagement are more likely to continue this participation as adults. Civic engagement is a habit learnt primarily in the formative years, which makes enlisting youths in civic society vital to its future functioning (Jowell & Park, 1998, Pontes et al., 2019; Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997; Zeldin, 2004). The socialisation process, influenced by elements such as the family, educational institutions, mass media, workplace, local committees and political institutions (Scott & Marshall, 2009) also has an impact on one's engagement and their political perspectives (Haralambos, Holborn & Heald, 2004). The term *Political Socialisation* is considered to be a process by which individuals or communities are induced, either in a passive or active manner, in a political system (Scott & Marshall. 2009).

An important resource for encouraging activism is family. The family plays a central role in social, cultural (Peterson, 2005; Rean, 2018) and political socialisation (Scott & Marshall.

2009). Although some studies tend to view the family as having a self-centred role and antithetical to civil society; there is a vast body of research that places the family as central in learning how to interpret and navigate the social world (Muddiman et al., 2019). Family is an important vehicle for the transmission of values and ideals and several scholars argue that the family is also an important gateway to understanding and participation in civil society (Eto, 2012; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Muddiman et al., 2019; Power et al., 2018; Young, 2000). Activities such as discussing current affairs and politics with family, or following the news, foster interest and may lead to motivation to engage in adolescence (McFarland & Thomas, 2006, Pace Gasan, 2016). Parents also lead by example and there is strong evidence in the literature to show that youths whose parents actively participate in civic, social and political practices and activism are much more likely to engage themselves (Briggs, 2008; Cicognani, et al, 2012). In fact, Muddiman et al. (2019) believe that family and parental example are of greater influence than any other route to participation.

Nonetheless, literature shows that there are three main pathways to engagement for youths. These include opportunities to serve their communities through the schools they attend, possibilities for getting involved through activities organised by the Church or religious organizations, and other community-based opportunities that may be provided by outside entities, including non-profit organisations (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Crocetti et al., 2014; D'Agostino & Visser, 2010; Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010). These provide opportunities for youths to engage in culturally and socially accepted ways.

Environment and experience are other factors that support youth participation. Biggs (2019) and Pancer et al. (2002) believe that the encouragement of an influential teacher or role model may serve as a key initiating factor. However, this encouragement would need support from family and peers and a suitable opportunity for engagement in order for participation to persevere. If these sustaining factors are not evident, participation may be discouraged, diminished or stop altogether (McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Pancer et al., 2002). This observation suggests that it is not only influence and interest that maintain participation, but also environment and encouragement. If the engaged youth meets with an environment that supports and values their engagement, they will be more likely to continue to participate, and this participation is likely to deepen (Cicognani et al., 2012; Pace Gasan, 2016; Pancer et al., 2007).

Life experiences also matter. As youth is a defining time in life, so too, the experiences that one goes through at this time help to define outlook and beliefs, including politically or historically charged events of the period. Flanagan (2009) states that historical events that occur during one's youth have a greater formative influence than if those same events were to occur in adulthood. Life-changing events or life-crises, such as cancer diagnosis of a significant person in one's life, or the experience of institutional unfairness towards one's family or friends, are also significant triggers for civic engagement (Lochocki, 2010).

Education and educational institutions have always been strong influential factors in a youth's life. Where citizenship education or community service are included in the curriculum, they have been found to have a profound effect on young people's active citizenship (Pace Gasan, 2016; Rochira et al., 2019), and countries that have added these subjects to the school syllabus have experienced a sharp increase in youth engagement

(Flanagan, 2009). Including citizenship education or community service in the curriculum not only educates young people about the world they are living in, but also creates awareness of possibilities for participating in the civic space. This has been shown to increase the students' interest in political and social issues (Branson, 2003; Cho et al., 2020; Flanagan, 2009). Critics of service learning maintain that it may lead youths towards charitable institutions and acts rather than to solving the underlying problems, and that civic education is primarily system-oriented and stability-oriented (Flanagan, 2009; Massing 1999 as cited in Yoldas, 2015, p.548). However, there is also significant research that suggests that the increase in competence and political insight that may occur through this kind of experience will likely develop into interest and activity in the political sphere (Azzopardi, 2012; Ballard, 2014; Cho et al., 2020; Flanagan, 2009). Flanagan elaborated by stating that engaging in civic education contributes to students' interest in politics and to their civic skills, while engaging in community service contributes to their sense of efficiency and democratic disposition, as well as to their willingness to address community issues (Flanagan, 2009). Civic education is therefore a good initiation to civic engagement and helps prepare young people for participation in their communities and in democracy (CIRCLE 2020).

Cicognani et al. (2012) believe that the type of educational institute one attends to also has bearing on their engagement. They found that students whose education was more challenging, for example students at Lycees (sixth forms), were more likely to be engaged and to discuss political and civic issues. Reasons for this could be the higher socio-economic status of families of students at Lycees and institutions of higher learning, and the longer view of life goals of the students themselves, as opposed to the focus on acquiring training and finding employment of students from vocational institutions (Cicognani et al., 2012; Delli Carpini, 2000). Flanagan (2009) elaborates that it is exposure to different perspectives and the grappling with questions and issues that is part of the curriculum of higher institutions and colleges that sparks interest and the willingness to engage.

While the literature on the benefits of civic education is quite clear, Maltese youth remain to score low in terms of civic knowledge (Ministry Education and Employment, 2016). The European Commission on Education and Training Monitor (2018b) showed that Malta scored to be the second lowest when compared to other participating EU countries, scoring 9 points below the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 average of 500. The same report highlighted significant discrepancies in scores based on secondary education, suggesting that those attending independent schools, and girls enrolled in church schools were more likely to have a higher score with regards to civic knowledge, even exceeding the international average score (Ministry Education and Employment, 2016).

Education, family and culture are all beneficial to developing youth understanding of their civic persona and where they fit in the world, however civic actors of any age chose to become actively involved when they had the motivation, opportunity and ability to do so. As we have seen above, forming and sustaining a civic identity is essential to motivate individuals to take up civic actions. Once the motivation is internalised, especially if this happens during the crucial, formative years of adolescence, the knowledge that one should act and the confidence that one's actions can make a difference, can prove strong motivators that last a lifetime (Poskitt & Bonney, 2016; Texas State, 2013).

Emotional factors however are also strong motivators to civic action (Crocetti et al., 2014; Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2018; Lochocki, 2010; Pancer et al., 2007; Putnam, 2000). Sentiments such as satisfaction in working for the greater good, solving problems within one's community, furthering personal values or causes, or the sense of achievement in influencing political participation are all potent calls to action (Ballard, 2014; Delli Carpini, 2000). Feelings of social responsibility, identification with the community and sense of belonging are important instigators to civic participation, as is the awareness of achievement derived from group membership and participation (Azzopardi, 2012; Delli Carpini, 2000; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Having the support of a functional community network that enables and provides opportunity for participation and gives context to one's existence is pivotal, as community engagement is generated through shared discourses among residents and can become a means for political engagement (Delli Carpini, 2000; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Putnam 2000). Political engagement exposes youths to differing viewpoints and encourages them to question the status quo, supporting the development of their civic identity and enabling youths to see themselves as active in their society. If youths have a positive experience in their interactions with political and other organisations, and feel valued and heard, they are more likely to respond by trusting these institutions and by wanting to participate - they can believe that they are capable of making a difference (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014; Ballard, 2014). This sense of agency is a compelling motivator and encourages further engagement (Kirshner, 2007; Youniss et al., 1997). The formation of civic habits in youth is a good indicator for future engagement (Delli Carpini, 2000, Flanagan, 2009).

2.4 Barriers to youth participation

Nonetheless, emotional factors and having a sense of civic identity alone are not enough to ensure active engagement. Ballard (2014) distinguishes between personal and systemic barriers. Personal barriers are made up of attitudes that reside with the individual and that demotivate engagement. They include complacency, lack of interest, or ideological opposition to civic involvement. On the other hand, systemic barriers are extrinsic influences that the youth believes will not allow for engagement, such as real or perceived lack the opportunities, skills, information, resources, experience, or knowledge (Ballard, 2014; Delli Carpini, 2000).

In order to participate the individual needs to have the opportunity and access to do so in a manner that is meaningful to them (Azzopardi, 2012; Delli Carpini, 2000). If the civic infrastructure allows for or facilitates participation, then citizens will be more likely to respond. Once young people are able to see that what they have to say is meaningful and that they will be listened to, to believe they have both self-efficiency and political efficiency, they will be more willing to participate and to continue doing so (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014; Coleman, Morrison & Svennevig, 2008; Ohmer, 2007). Moreover, having the opportunity to be involved meaningfully "narrows the gap in civic knowledge between demographic groups" (Ballard, 2014, p. 442), making societies more equitable.

However if there is not trust in government or other organisations, or the belief that participation can be meaningful, this may give rise to apathy or disengagement (Anderson et al., 2018; Cicognani et al., 2012). Multiple scholars established that young people have evidently moved away from institutional politics as the turnout of young voters in elections has decreased towards greater involvement in new social movement which allows for

discussion on specific socio-political issues, as their interest in politics persists (Azzopardi, 2012; Briggs, 2008; Quéniart & Jacques, 2010). Why participate if no one is going to take notice or care? Young people are often not given the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way where they can influence decisions (Ballard, 2014). It is this perception of low efficacy, rather than political disinterest, that drives low participation in political, social and civic life (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014; Delli Carpini, 2000). In fact, Ballard (2014) found that even highly motivated youths may decline to engage if they feel disempowered.

Access is also a problem. If youths are not involved at meaningful levels, but only given duties on the periphery of the organisation or discourse, this may demotivate them. Operating in an adult world that they are on the cusp of, youths often lack authority and power (Amiot, de la Sablonnière, Terry & Smith, 2007; Kirshner, 2007; Smith et al., 2005). Situations that grant them access to their peers and elders, as well as voice their opinions, are more likely to engage them and make them want to be involved (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014; Rochira et al., 2019; Youniss et al., 1997). Access can be even more of a problem for youths from disadvantaged communities or minority demographics. Young people of colour and from other minorities are not very present in youth civic engagement and have fewer possibilities to engage in activities that will further enhance their growth and opportunities (Anderson et al., 2018; CIRCLE 2020; Pearrow, 2008; Saito et al., 2006). However, once an effort was made to provide these opportunities to youths who might not naturally get involved, it was found that there were numerous additional benefits for them, including a decrease in intra-personal violence and delinquency, as well as the development of positive youth competencies, self-esteem and sense of achievement (Zeldin, 2004).

Other systematic barriers that youths often feel impedes their desire for engagement are a belief that they are not allowed or not able to enter what they perceive as an adult world, and an actual or perceived lack of interest from adult leaders towards youths, particularly as regards political issues, as well as a disinterest in involving youths or aiming policies and discussions at a sector of society that does not have a strong showing at the ballot box (Delli Carpini, 2000). D'Agostino & Visser list a number of other barriers that may affect youth engagement, such as social barriers, youth perceptions of adult stereotypes and the impact of socio-economic status, or having other commitments and priorities and not having, or not making, time (D'Agostino & Visser, 2010). However, as Schlupp & Franklin note, "once people get involved, constraints on time no longer are an important issue" (2014, p.31).

Another reason for lack of youth interest and involvement in political and civic activities is that there is a disconnect between the institutional environments of governance - both local and national - and civic organisations and the fast paced, individualistic and increasingly digitalised setting of today's young people's lives and interests (Delli Carpini, 2000; Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010).

2.5 Engagement in a digital world

The idea that modern youth are increasingly disenchanted and disengaged (Crocetti et al., 2014; Delli Carpini, 2000; Putnam, 2000) is challenged by various authors who maintain that youths are actually engaged, but in different ways to their predecessors (Briggs, 2008; Dalton, 2008; Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2018; Loader et al., 2014). Today's youth, are more likely to volunteer in charitable organisations or take

part in environmental clean ups than join political parties or labour unions, or write to politicians (Crocetti et al., 2014; Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2018; Lochocki, 2010). This does not necessarily mean that they are apathetic and uninterested. There is much evidence to show that they are still very much interested in the workings of the world around them, and that they are still politically vocal - just in different ways (Smith et al., 2005; The Healthy People, 2020). Youths express their engagement by, for example, organising and attending protests, through boycotts or via vocal espousal of values. They also often engage in lifestyle activism, whereby they live their lives according to their principles by say, only buying products that are ethically produced (Amiot et al. 2007; de Zúñiga, Copeland & Bimber, 2014; European Commission, 2018; Flanagan, 2009).

Moreover, much of youth's civic engagement is carried out online (Bennett et al., 2010; Kaun & Uldam, 2018; Loader et al., 2014). Today's young people were born into a world that was already fully digitalised at the time of their birth, so it is not surprising that they are utilising digital platforms as their preferred way of entertainment, interaction, as well as speaking up. Many youth interactions, including interactions in the civic sphere, are happening online (Anderson et al., 2018; Ng, 2019; Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, 2015). Social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter are widely used as key spaces for, among other things, political discussion and engagement as well as for the discussion and promotion of civic issues and action (Anderson et al., 2018, Cho et al., 2020).

Along with the traditional institutions of family and school, social media has become a major formative influence in young people's lives (Loader et al., 2014; Lochocki, 2010; Parliamentary Secretary for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, 2015). Smartphone usage is nearly ubiquitous among teens and today's 'networked young citizens' are finding their voice on digital platforms, where they can express thoughts and values that may be denied expression in the formalised, dutiful and perhaps antiquated structures of conventional governance (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Delli Carpini, 2000; Loader et al., 2014). Cho et al. (2020) state that digital technology provides an easily accessible platform for young people - allowing them to create content that is potentially vastly scalable - and that youth engagement is inseparable from online engagement. This becomes even more meaningful for those youths who do not feel that they belong to the mainstream, such as immigrants, young people of colour and/or LGBTIQ youth (Anderson et al., 2018; Delli Carpini, 2000). Through social media, youths gain socio-political empowerment and expand their reach and experience. They come to realise that they can meaningfully influence political discourses, consumer decisions, and their peers (Cho et al., 2020; Delli Carpini, 2000).

Access to the internet and technology has become widespread. Anderson & Jiang (2018) report that 95% of teens have a smartphone or access to one, and that 45% state that they are online on an almost constant basis. In 2018 the main platforms for teen interactions were YouTube, Instagram and SnapChat, with Facebook use having decreased but remaining strong. However, as of February 2020, TikTok has taken over and is now one of the most widely used social media platforms (Cho et al., 2020).

Young people use social media regularly to read news, to connect with others who share an interest in a similar cause, and to raise awareness or comment on a cause or issue (Anderson

et al., 2018). Social media presents an easy entry way for people to give their opinion and engage with others and is often used to highlight civic, environmental and political issues (Anderson et al., 2018; Cho et al., 2020; Duggan & Smith, 2016). This is especially relevant for youths, who, before social media, had much more limited access to public life. Social media creates a participatory culture where youths and other users can both consume and produce content (Cho et al., 2020; Loader et al., 2014). Most social media users see these platforms as a valuable gateway for engagement, with political discussion being a regular fact of their digital lives (Duggan & Smith, 2016). Social media platforms are extremely useful in giving voice to those who might not be otherwise included in political discussions, as well as those who would like to engage but do not know where to start (Anderson et al., 2018; Delli Carpini, 2000; Duggan & Smith, 2016). Cho et al. (2020) reinforce this finding by quoting data from 11 countries that shows that between 43- 64% of 9 to 17 year olds look for news online, while 12-27% of children discuss political problems online.

The way in which young people use social media presents a picture of a more personalised type of engagement, one that favours immediate reactions, that is goal-oriented and more episodic than the traditional understanding of engagement (Cho et al., 2020; Lochocki, 2010). Personal satisfaction and personal goals have become as important as motivators in finding one's voice, sense of belonging, or working for the greater good (Loader et al., 2014; Lochocki, 2010; Schlupp & Franklin, 2014). This tendency towards reactive and episodic engagement has led to charges of *clicktivism*, which is seen as the act of passively clicking in support of a cause rather than actively supporting it (Cho et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). This accusation is sometimes taken even further with young people's use of social media being charged with *slacktivism* rather than activism. *Slacktivism* is a pejorative term for those who act in support of a cause by clicking 'like' but who only wish to appear to have virtue as signal to peers but not really engaging any further (Barberá et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2019; Cho et al., 2020). Yet research shows that even youths who are not core individuals in the online discourse have an important part to play in spreading the message and aiding others to engage further (Barberá et al., 2015). Also, youths who engage in online discourses are far more likely to take on deeper forms of engagement. Cho et al. state that "youth digital participation ... is directly correlated to higher political engagement, online and off" (2020, p. 13). Although there are those who will only ever engage episodically, liking a post or posting an occasional comment could lead to deeper engagement and constitute the start of awareness and involvement (Cho et al., 2020; Lochocki, 2010).

Children and adolescents use humour, memes, satire, caricatures and other user produced content as a way of engaging, mixing civic comment with popular culture (Cho et al., 2020; Kaun & Uldam, 2018). The digital platform that youths select for their online interactions is also indicative. Choice of platform is based on the range of functions and features offered by these platforms (Cho et al., 2020). Online environments present a wide variety of facts, experiences and opinions, making them easily and widely accessible, and creating a simple way of connecting with others. Social media enables youths to go beyond the constraints of geography, ethnicity, gender or culture (Anderson et al., 2018; Delli Carpini, 2000). The mass distribution effects of social media have also enabled users to utilise online environments to raise attention and mobilise action for causes that have gone global. Movements such as BlackLivesMatter, OccupyWallStreet, Greta Thunberg's environmental activism and the current outcry over the killing in the US of George Floyd quickly acquired global resonance and following thanks to social media (Barberá et al., 2015; Loader et al., 2014).

The downside to social media use is that there is a vast amount of information of dubious provenance and veracity that the user needs to navigate in order to find reliable information, issue or viewpoint that they seek (Anderson et al., 2014; Delli Carpini, 2000). There are also other significant issues with online environments. The sheer overload, fragmentation, focus on consumerism, manipulation of information and dominance of entertainment over other issues cause frustration and fatigue among users and divert attention from content dealing with politics, current affairs, civic issues and engagement (Delli Carpini, 2000). Another off-putting characteristic is that, although interaction on social media is generally agreeable, it can also be a breeding ground for bullying, hate speech and toxicity, especially towards public figures and even more so against female public figures (Amnesty International, 2018; Loader et al., 2014). This aspect of social media use is problematic for civic engagement as it can cause users to hold back on expressing their opinions or getting involved in causes they hold dear, due to the fear of backlash and abuse they may receive. There is a sense that exposing personal opinions is a high-risk endeavour and uncertainty about the reception of posts often causes individuals to water down or suppress what they wish to say (Amnesty International, 2018; Duggan & Smith, 2016; Loader et al., 2014). As CEO of Twitter Jack Dorsey stated in 2016, "Abuse is not part of civil discourse. It shuts down conversation and prevents us from understanding one another." (Amnesty International, 2018). A further criticism is that social media enables unwanted issues such as contentious or disturbing issues, or unwelcome political posts, to encroach on users' daily life in ways that are hard to block (Amnesty International, 2018, Cho et al., 2020).

These negative aspects make a sound knowledge of digital literacy all the more important, particularly for young people who are utilising this medium as their primary means of communication and contact. It is imperative that they are taught to use it responsibly while staying safe, and that they are taught to navigate the pitfalls (Nascimbeni & Vosloo, 2019). Nevertheless, despite the drawbacks, online digital platforms remain the communication medium of choice for young people, and overall, youths report that they are not affected by their use of social media as it is mostly positive (Loader et al., 2014).

Through effective online participation, young citizens have shown that, despite beliefs that today's youths are increasingly disengaged and apathetic, they are, on the contrary, not participating in what might be considered to be more traditional or classic forms of engagement, but they are certainly active, mainly through their social media interactions. Research has shown that although some of this activism is episodic and centred around what is happening at the current point in time, it can lead to a more sustained engagement. Today's young people are still very much interested in politics, in the environment, in those who have less advantages, and they are vocal about it. They participate in civic movements and discourses, holding elected representatives, organisations and social movements to account and monitoring policies and actions (Loader et al., 2014). Understanding this new landscape of youth engagement is important in sustaining youth's participation, activism and involvement (Loader et al., 2014).

2.6 Conclusion

Young people have a long history of being strong forces for change in society. Far from being apathetic and only interested in the minutiae of their own lives, youths are invested in the world they are forming and wish to have their say in making their world a

better place. The activities youths engage in vary vastly, as do the motivations they report. In fact, particularly given the vast reach of social media, it is likely that youths are motivated to civic action by more than one drive (Ballard, 2014).

Youth is an important period for identity development, and civic participation is a significant contributor to the formation of the future self (Flanagan, 2009; Youniss et al., 1997). Positive experiences of engagement lead to further engagement and can positively shape a habit that will last a lifetime (Crocetti et al., 2014). While youth interests and behaviours do change over time, new issues and events tend to be interpreted through their experiences. As a result, dramatic shifts later in life, such as how or whether they engage in civic action, are uncommon. Rather, increases in participation as generations age, tend to be gradual and directly tied to initial rates of youth civic engagement (Delli Carpini, 2000).

Youth participation in civic life is important as young people guarantee continuity and the legitimacy of government and institutions. Young people's attitudes and concerns are important, and serve as an indicator of the shape that our future will take. Social and political improvement and change do not come about unless these institutions are examined and challenged and we need the continuity of youth to see that this is carried forward.



3

Methodology

As previously discussed the scope of this research project was to examine prevalent attitudes and identify motivators and barriers that influence the participation of UM students in civil society; and to provide recommendations to encourage further civic participation amongst this cohort. The research questions central to this study included:

1. How are young people involved in civic participation?
2. What factors influence the participation of youth in civil society?

Hence, in order to address the research question in discussion, a quantitative approach was considered appropriate for this study, as it would allow for an exploration of the extent of involvement in civic society, and the dynamics of such participation amongst the specified target group.

3.1 Data Collection Tool

An online survey was designed to include four (4) sections: demographics, civic involvement, and motivators and barriers for activism. The second section addressed the subject of “how are young people are involved in civic participation?” Sections three and four would allow for the second research question, “what factors influence the participation of youth in civil society?” to be answered. The first section, demographics, would allow for the research team to further examine the data collected and identify patterns amongst specific cohorts within the UM student body. The survey was based on the literature discussed in Chapter 2 of this report, and on Clary et al.’s (1996) Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), whereby they created a model that examined the functional motivations behind the choice to volunteer.

Google Forms was used to create the online survey. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 Sampling & Recruitment of Survey Participants

The target population for this research project involved students enrolled at the University of Malta (UM), as this was established to be an appropriate convenience sample for the study and, since the majority of students tend to be in their youth, the purpose of this study would also be reached.

The UM student body is composed of around 11,500 students (University of Malta, 2020).

To reach all students, the survey was distributed via the UM Registrar mailing system. The survey was initially distributed on the 26th of May 2020, and a reminder was sent on a later date. Furthermore, the Dean of the Faculty for Social Well-being distributed the survey to other Deans / Heads of Departments for them to disseminate again with their student body. The survey was sent out again to students within the Faculty for Social Well-being and uploaded on the Faculty's Facebook page as a final attempt to increase the response rate. Only one response derived from the distribution on Facebook, with the final number of participants in the study standing at 292 students. Therefore, the response rate obtained from the UM student population was 2.54%.

Of the respondents, the majority were female ($n = 177$, 62.1%) and falling within the 18 - 25 year old age group ($n = 164$, 58.4%). Moreover, participants' residences were distributed amongst different regions, with the majority residing in the Northern and Northern Harbour Regions ($n = 138$, 47.9%). Table 3.1 below shows the distribution of participants' gender, age and region.

Table 3.1 Participants' Demographics

Gender	N	%	Age	N	%	Region	N	%
Female	177	62.1	18 - 25	164	58.4	Gozo/Comino	16	5.6
Male	108	37.9	26 - 35	55	19.6	Northern Harbour	78	27.1
Total	285	100	36 - 45	35	12.5	Southern Harbour	41	14.2
			46+	27	9.6	Southern Eastern	42	14.6
			Total	281	100	Western	51	17.7
						Northern	60	20.8
						Total	288	100

Table 3.2 refers to the participants' nationality, most of which were Maltese ($n = 273$, 69.8%), and their main language, again with Maltese being the most prominent ($n = 231$, 79.4%).

Table 3.2 Participants' Nationality and Main Language

Nationality	N	%	Main language	N	%
Maltese	273	69.8%	Maltese	231	79.4
EU National	11	2.8%	English	48	16.5
Other	7	1.8%	Other	12	4
Total	291	100%	Total	291	100

Respondents were also asked to provide information on their enrolment within the University of Malta. The largest number of participants were enrolled with the Faculty of Arts ($n = 65$, 22.3%), followed by those registered with the Faculty of Theology ($n = 46$, 15.8%) and the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy ($n = 37$, 12.7%). Most

respondents followed a course at Undergraduate level ($n = 276$, 95.5%), and on a full-time basis ($n = 197$, 67.9%). Further information can be found in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Participants' Enrolment at the University of Malta

Faculty	N	%	Study Level	N	%	Attendance	N	%
Arts	65	22.3	Undergraduate	276	95.5	Full-time	197	67.9
Built Environment	10	3.4	Post-Graduate	13	4.5	Part-time	93	32.1
Economics, Management and Accountancy	37	12.7	Total	289	100	Total	290	100
Education	24	8.2						
Engineering	6	2.1						
Health Sciences	21	7.2						
Information and Communication Technology	13	4.5						
Laws	22	7.6						
Media and Knowledge Sciences	3	1.0						
Medicine and Surgery	10	3.4						
Science	14	4.8						
Theology	46	15.8						
Other	14	4.8						
Multiple	6	2.1						
Total	291	100						

Furthermore, we requested participants' educational background, as previous research has found that enrolment in private and/or church schools leads to further encouragement towards civic participation (Cicognani et al., 2012). The majority of respondents have been enrolled in Government schools throughout their primary ($n = 148$, 50.9%), secondary ($n = 136$, 46.7%) and post-secondary education ($n = 216$, 77.1%). Table 3.4 below refers.

Table 3.4 Participants' Educational Background

Primary	N	%	Secondary	N	%	Post-Secondary	N	%
Government School	148	50.9	Government School	136	46.7	Government School	216	77.1
Church School	96	33.0	Church School	120	41.2	Church School	49	17.5
Private / Independent School	47	16.2	Private / Independent School	35	12.0	Private / Independent School	15	5.4
Total	291	100	Total	291	100	Total	280	100

Participants were further asked about their engagement in employment, with more than two thirds of respondents being in employment ($n = 196, 67.8\%$), with only 153 respondents answering this question, of which the majority were employed on a full-time basis ($n = 84, 54.9\%$); as shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Participants' Engagement in Employment

In Employment	N	%	Employment Type	N	%
Employed	196	67.8	Full-time	84	54.9
Not Employed	93	32.2	Part-time	69	45.1
Total	289	100	Total	153	100

Further information regarding the participants' household and parents' educational background was requested, as presented in Table 3.6 and Table 3.7 on page 31.

Most participants still resided with their parent/s ($n = 179, 61.5\%$), with an absolute majority of participants' parents being married ($n = 239, 82.1\%$).

Table 3.7 shows that the majority of parents had completed up to minimum of secondary education.

Table 3.6 Participants' Household

Household	N	%	Parents' Marital Status	N	%
Both parents	154	52.9	Married	239	82.1
One parent	25	8.6	Other	52	17.9
Partner / Spouse	56	19.2			
Other	56	19.2			
Total	291	100.0	Total	291	100.0

Table 3.7 Participants' Parents Educational Attainment

Parent 1	N	%	Parent 2	N	%
Primary School	33	11.5	Primary School	38	13.3
Secondary	148	51.6	Secondary	130	45.5
Tertiary	73	25.4	Tertiary	76	26.6
Post-graduate	33	11.5	Post-graduate	42	14.7
Total	287	100	Total	286	100

3.3 Survey Data Analysis

The data collected through the online survey was then analysed using SPSS; where a number of tests were conducted. Cross-tabulations were used to identify frequencies of responses across various demographic factors, while Pearson's Chi Square test of association was used to further examine whether any statistically significant relationships existed between variables.

3.4 Limitations

No study comes without limitations. Primarily, a quantitative approach is in itself limited as, while it quantifies responses, it does not delve into the underlying reasoning of participants' responses. The research team included a number of categorical variables and a few open-ended questions intended to elicit underlying reasoning for participants' choices.

The nature of the current study required a substantial response rate, consistency between responses and efficient distribution, which were catered for by the selection of a self report survey. However, the downside to this was that additional questions were not possible when clarification was needed. Furthermore, self-report surveys are potentially subject to response bias, whereby participants may provide more socially-desirable responses; in this case, such response bias may have resulted in over-reporting their level of involvement in activism.

Moreover, a general limitation was the number of responses, which totalled 291 responses. This, together with the design of the survey, which included multiple categories for one to choose from, created a drawback in the analysis process, especially for correlation purposes, as certain questions did not receive the sufficient distribution of responses required for statistical testing. Thus, the assumptions for certain tests of correlation were not reached, and therefore such tests could not be performed, possibly limiting the outcome of the study.

Finally, the use of a non-random convenience sampling method meant that the final sample is not representative of all Maltese youth, nor of the UM population. Thus, no generalisations could be made to youth in general, or those attending tertiary education institutions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

A Research Ethics & Data Protection Form (REDP), in line with the University of Malta's Research Code of Practice (2019) was submitted with the Faculty for Social Well-being

Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) in May 2020, prior to the launching of the online questionnaire.

No ethical concerns were highlighted as anonymity was being guaranteed throughout, and no sensitive data was being collected. Moreover, participation in the study was completely voluntary. The online questionnaire was distributed through the UM mailing system through the Registrar's Office, and therefore was in line with GDPR regulations.

4

Main Findings

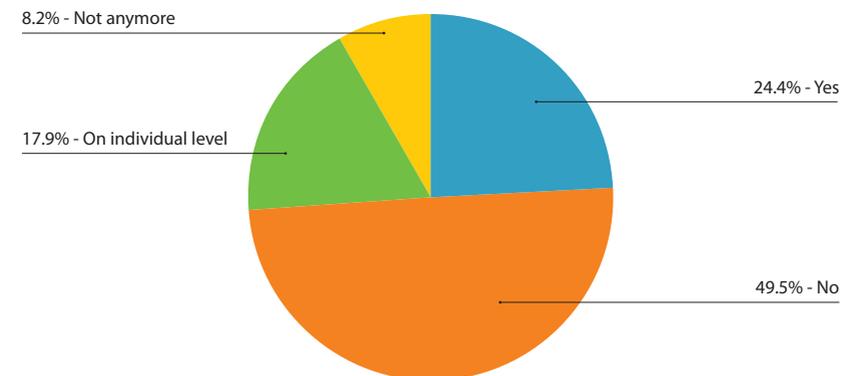
The first research question posed for this study focuses on the extent and nature of youths' activism. Thus, the first part of the findings will present results based on the prevalence of respondents' participation in civil society. Moreover, the second question aims to understand the factors that motivate or hinder participation amongst the sample group. These will be discussed in the second section of this chapter.

4.1 Prevalence of civic participation amongst UM students

Participants were asked multiple questions to determine their civic participation. Primarily, they were asked whether they are involved or not. This was followed by questions on the cause they were committed to, the medium and type of activities they engaged through, and the frequency of their participation.

With regards to their current involvement, the majority of participants claimed that they have never been active, or are not involved anymore ($n = 168, 57.7\%$), whereas the rest of the respondents claimed that they are active ($n = 71, 24.4\%$) or active on an individual basis ($n = 52, 17.9\%$), as presented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Participants' Active Participation



Further analysis was carried out to assess the relationship between demographic information and respondents' participation in civil society. When testing for socio-demographic variables, Table 4.1 shows that a statistically significant difference was found

between activism and age group; gender; post-secondary education; attendance; and type of employment ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4.1 Chi Square Test for Socio-demographic Variables and Activism

Socio-demographic	X2 (df)	p
Age	8.137(3)	0.043
Gender	5.942(1)	0.015
Region	7.365(5)	0.195
Primary Education	2.931(2)	0.231
Secondary Education	4.085(2)	0.130
Post-secondary Education	8.197(2)	0.017
Study level	0.689(1)	0.407
Attendance	10.037(1)	0.002
In employment	0.432(1)	0.511
Type of Employment	14.405(1)	0.000
Household Type	7.461(3)	0.059
Parents' Marital Status	0.392(1)	0.531
Parent1 Education	5.539(3)	0.136
Parent2 Education	6.315(3)	0.097
Nationality	1.651(1)	0.199
Main Language	0.413(1)	0.520

Moreover, those in the 18 - 25-year-old cohort were more likely than other age groups to engage in activism, with rates of activism gradually decreasing with age. With regard to gender, women were significantly more likely to be active (48%) than men (33%). Those who attended church schools for post-secondary education were also significantly more active (61%) than participants who had attended independent (47%) or government (39%) schools. Furthermore, students enrolled with UM on a full-time basis (49%) were significantly more likely to engage in activism than students enrolled on a part-time basis (29%). A significant association was also found for employment type, whereby students engaged in part-time employment (54%) were more likely to engage in activism, compared to students engaged in full-time employment, of whom 24% were classified as active.

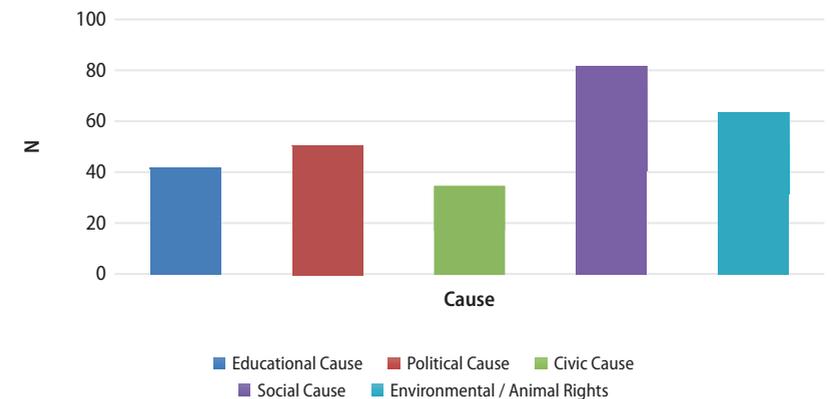
4.1.1 Causes Engaged in Through Activism

Participants were mostly engaged in a social cause ($n = 82$, 28.2%), followed by a commitment towards the environment and/or animal rights ($n = 64$, 22%). See Figure 4.2 on page 35.

Table 4.2 Activism by Socio-demographic

Socio-demographic	Active		Not Active		Total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Age Group	18 - 25	81	49.4	83	50.6	164	100.0
	26 - 35	18	32.7	37	67.3	55	100.0
	36 - 45	12	34.3	23	65.7	35	100.0
	46+	8	29.6	19	70.4	27	100.0
Gender	Female	85	48.0	92	52.0	177	100.0
	Male	36	33.3	72	66.7	108	100.0
Post-Secondary Education	Government School	84	38.9	132	61.1	216	77.1%
	Church School	30	61.2	19	38.8	49	17.5%
	Independent School	7	46.7	8	53.3	15	5.4%
Attendance	Full-time	96	48.7	101	51.3	197	67.9%
	Part-time	27	29.0	66	71.0	93	32.1%
Type of employment	Full-time	20	23.8	64	76.2	84	54.9%
	Part-time	37	53.6	32	46.4	69	45.1%

Figure 4.2 Participants' Commitment to a Cause



Further analysis for the cause which participants engaged in was done through cross-tabulation with regards to socio-demographic variables that were found to have a significant relation with activism. Figures 4.3 – 4.7 show engagement with a particular cause based on age group, gender, post-secondary education, attendance within UM, and type of employment, respectively.

As commitment towards a social cause was prevalent amongst all participants, civic and environmental causes took precedence amongst the 46+ age group, while educational activism was much stronger amongst young people. With respect to gender, women were more likely to engage in social and environmental causes, compared to men who were more active in social and political activism. More of those who attended a private/independent post-secondary education were involved in civic activism, in comparison to those who attended government and church schools for their post-secondary education, with the latter being more active in educational and political causes. Of the participants who were enrolled with UM on a full-time basis, activism involving an educational cause was more prominent, whereas a shift to civic activism was highlighted amongst those studying on a part-time basis. This observation was also reversely shown in Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.3 Cause by Age group

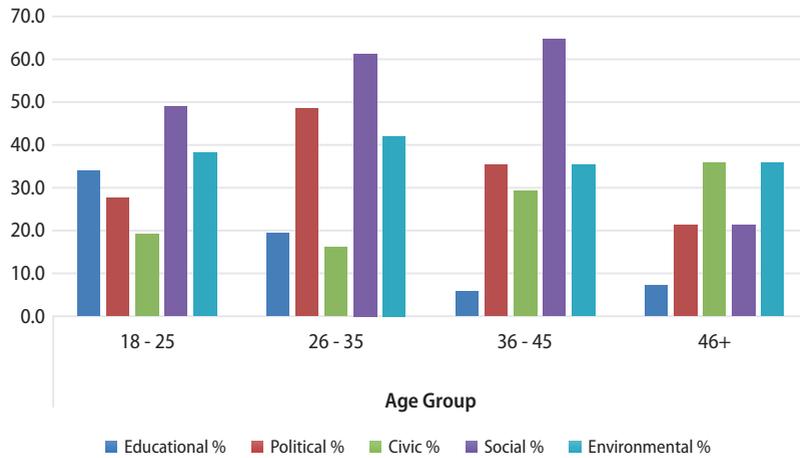


Figure 4.4 Cause by Gender

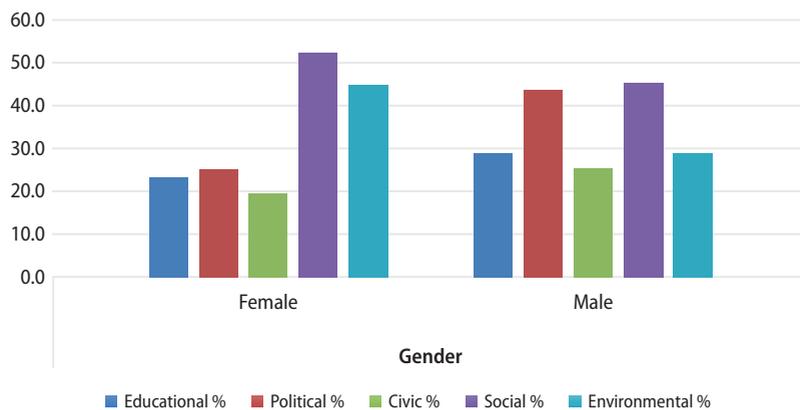


Figure 4.5 Cause by Post-Secondary Education

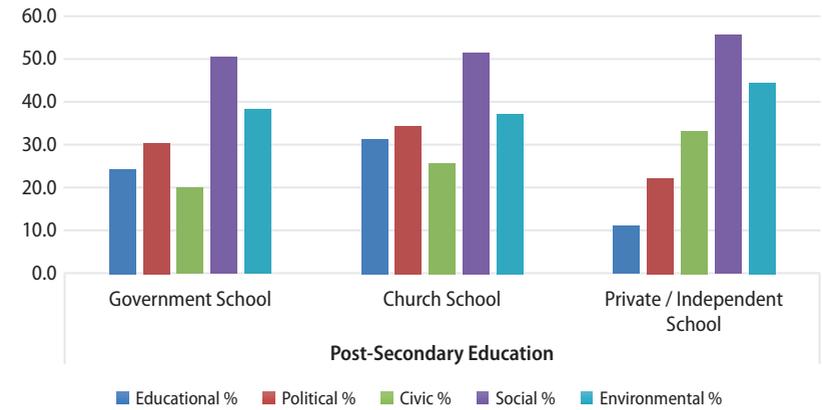


Figure 4.6 Cause by Attendance at UM

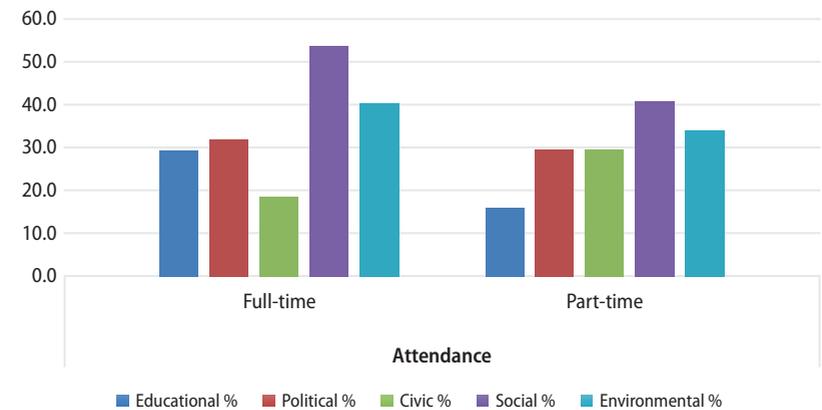
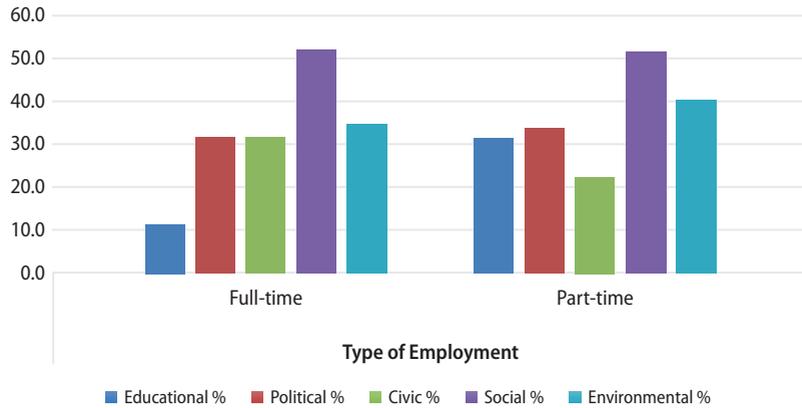


Figure 4.7 Cause by Type of Employment



Most respondents only engaged in one or two causes, however almost a fifth of respondents were active in more than three causes ($n = 28, 17.9\%$) as presented in Figure 4.8. Moreover, Table 4.3 below shows the number of causes that participants engaged according to their socio-demographic characteristics, with no particular group standing out to be active in more than 3 causes.

Figure 4.8 Participants' Commitment to Multiple Causes

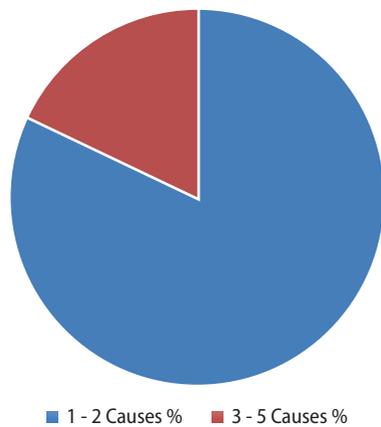


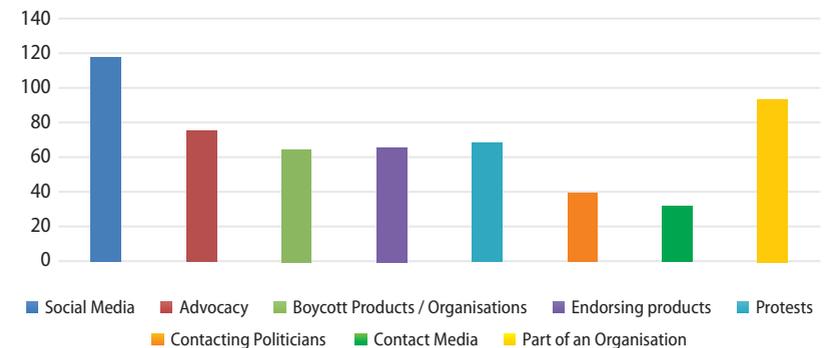
Table 4.3 Socio-demographic by Number of Causes

Socio-demographic Variable		1 - 2 Causes		3 - 5 Causes		Total
		N	%	N	%	N
Age Group	18 - 25	78	83.0	16	17.0	94
	26 - 35	22	71.0	9	29.0	31
	36 - 45	14	82.4	3	17.6	17
	46+	14	100.0	0	0.0	14
Gender	Female	89	83.2	18	16.8	107
	Male	44	80.0	11	20.0	55
Post-Secondary Education	Government School	97	84.3	18	15.7	115
	Church School	25	71.4	10	28.6	35
	Private / Independent School	8	88.9	1	11.1	9
Attendance	Full-time	94	79.0	25	21.0	119
	Part-time	40	90.9	4	9.1	44
Type of employment	Full-time	31	88.6	4	11.4	35
	Part-time	34	75.6	11	24.4	45

4.1.2 Media Used for Activism

New technology results in further opportunities for individuals to spread awareness and use different media to spread their message. Figure 4.9 shows the means through which respondents engage as part of their activism. Evidently, social media ($n = 118, 40.5\%$) takes precedence over any other media, with contacting politicians ($n = 40, 13.8\%$) and contacting media ($n = 32, 11\%$) attracting least responses. Interestingly, respondents still consider being part of an organisation to be an important part of activism ($n = 94, 32.3\%$).

Figure 4.9 Medium Used for Participants' Activism



Similarly to the way in which social media seems to be the most common form of activism amongst all age groups, Figure 4.10 shows that boycotting products stands out amongst the 36 – 45 year olds, and that contacting politicians seems to be stronger amongst the older cohort. Similar patterns emerge between genders (Figure 4.11), whereas there is clear discrepancy for use of social media, being part of an organisation, and use of other platforms amongst those who attended a government institution for their post-secondary education, as per Figure 4.12. Figures 4.13 and 4.14 show the medium used based on UM attendance and type of employment, respectively. Again, social media and being part of an organisation are most common platforms.

Figure 4.10 Medium by Age Group

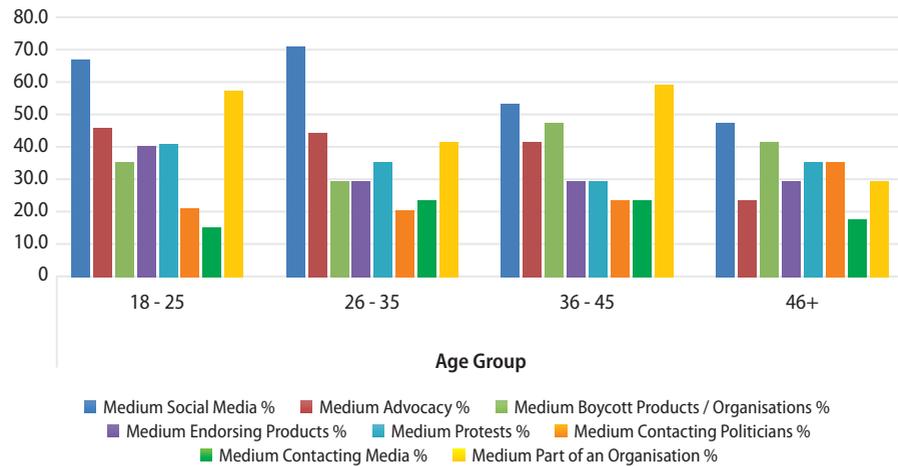


Figure 4.11 Medium by Gender

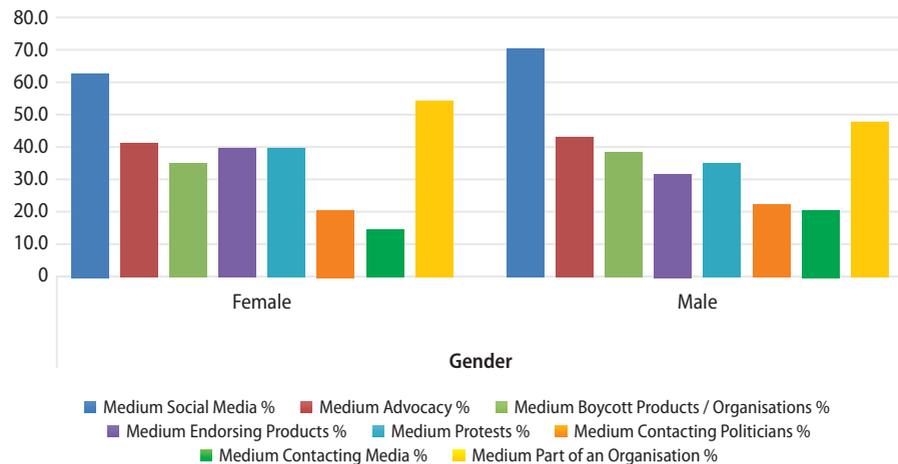


Figure 4.12 Medium by Post-Secondary Education

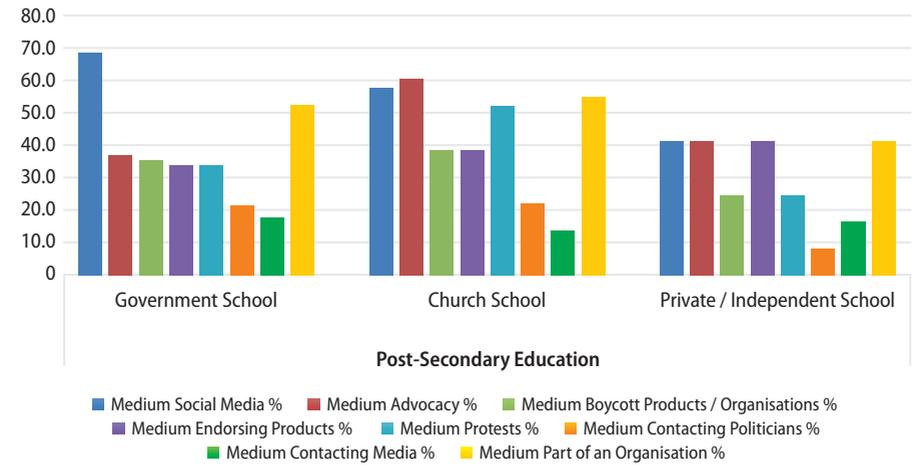


Figure 4.13 Medium by UM Attendance

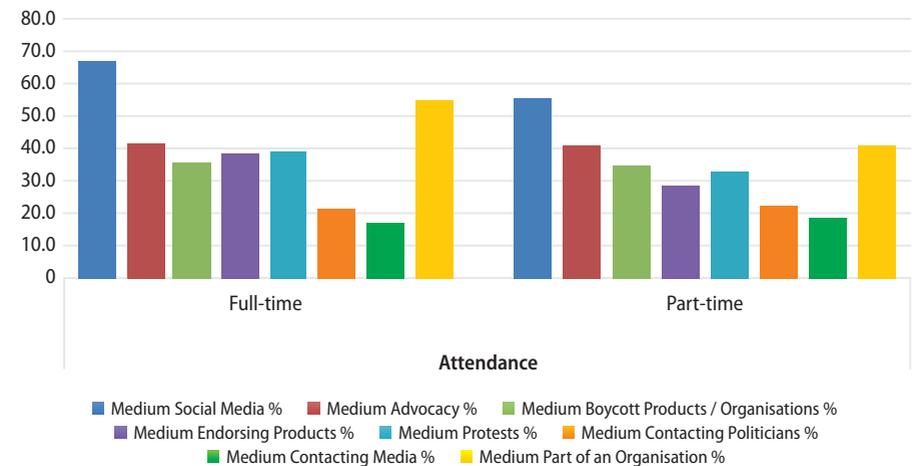
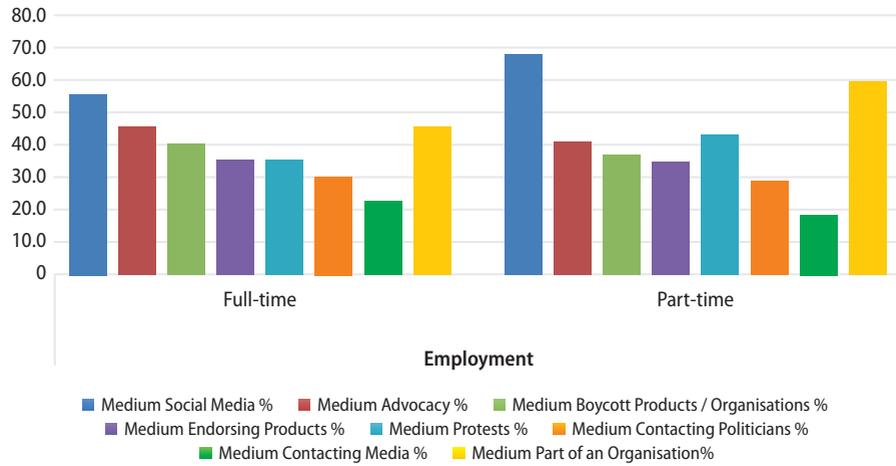


Figure 4.14 Medium by Type of Employment



An equal amount of participants ($n = 75, 43.4\%$) engaged in either 1 – 2 media or 3 – 5. Figure 4.15 shows that a minority of less than a fifth participants ($n = 23, 13.3\%$) were active on more than six platforms. Further socio-demographic analysis was undertaken, the results of which presented in Table 4.4. Young people aged between 18 – 25 seem to be more active on a diversity of platforms, with just under a third being active on more than three platforms ($n = 64, 60.9\%$), whereas those older than 46 years of age were more like to only engage on one or two platforms ($n = 11, 64.7\%$). With regards to post-secondary education, being active on three to five media was more prevalent amongst those who attended a Church Institution ($n = 25, 69.4\%$). Moreover, those who attended University on a full-time basis were more likely to be active on more than three media ($n = 81, 60.9\%$) when compared to those on a part-time basis. Again such a finding is reflected in the type of employment analysis on a reverse basis. There seems to be a gender balance when discussing the number of media used to express one’s activism.

Figure 4.15 Participants’ Engagement through Multiple Media

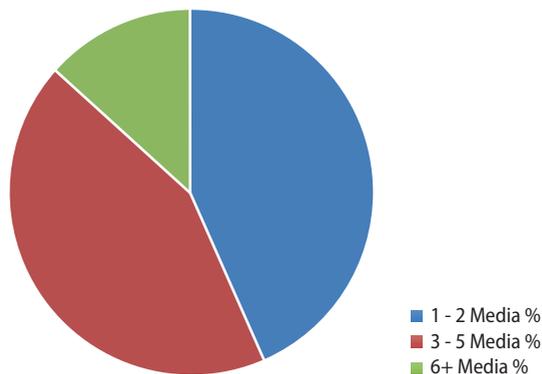


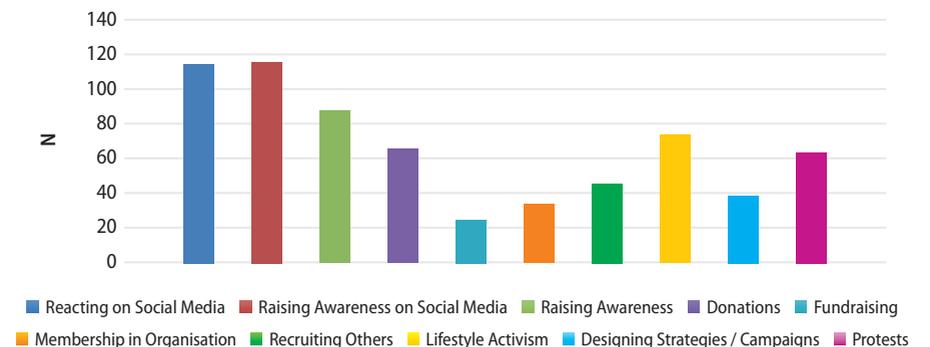
Table 4.4 Socio-demographic by Number of Media

Socio-demographic		1 - 2		3 - 5		6+		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age Group	18 - 25	41	39.0	50	47.6	14.0	13.3	105	100.0
	26 - 35	15	44.1	15	44.1	4.0	11.8	34	100.0
	36 - 45	8	47.1	6	35.3	3.0	17.6	17	100.0
	46+	11	64.7	4	23.5	2.0	11.8	17	100.0
Gender	Female	51	43.6	53	45.3	13.0	11.1	117	100.0
	Male	27	42.9	27	42.9	9.0	14.3	63	100.0
Post-Secondary Education	Government School	61	47.7	49	38.3	18.0	14.1	128	100.0
	Church School	8	22.2	25	69.4	3.0	8.3	36	100.0
	Private / Independent School	8	66.7	2	16.7	2.0	16.7	12	100.0
Attendance	Full-time	52	39.1	64	48.1	17.0	12.8	133	100.0
	Part-time	26	54.2	16	33.3	6.0	12.5	48	100.0
Type of employment	Full-time	19	48.7	13	33.3	7.0	17.9	39	100.0
	Part-time	19	39.6	21	43.8	8.0	16.7	48	100.0

4.1.3 Activities engaged in

Again the use of social media stands out as the strongest activity through which respondents claim to be involved in civic participation. Figure 4.16 shows that participants chose such platforms to raise awareness ($n = 116, 39.9\%$) and react ($n = 115, 39.5\%$). These were then followed by general awareness raising ($n = 88, 30.2\%$), lifestyle activism ($n = 74, 25.4\%$) and giving donations ($n = 66, 22.7\%$).

Figure 4.16 Activities participants were involved in



A more in-depth look at the activities in which participants engage, in relation to the socio-demographic variables, is presented in Figures 4.17 to 4.21, below. While engaging on social media takes precedence, those aged between 26 – 35 years old are more likely to react to content, instead of raising awareness. Interestingly, giving donations is also a strong form of activism for the younger generation, especially when compared to 36 – 45 year old respondents who do not seem that inclined to donate money. Between genders, women are more likely to engage through lifestyle activism, donating money and raising funds, contrary to men.

Participation on social media drops amongst students who attended a private school for their post-secondary education, in comparison to those attending at a Government Institution; while lifestyle activism seems to be one of the strong forms of activism for those who attended an independent school. Engaging in demonstrations and/or protests seem to be more common practice by those who attended a Religious Institution for their post-secondary education.

Similar patterns emerge between those enrolled at UM on a full-time or part-time basis. However, those working on a part-time basis are more likely to give donations and engage in organisations, while they are less likely than those who are employed on a full-time basis to adopt lifestyle activism.

Figure 4.17 Activities engaged in by Age Group

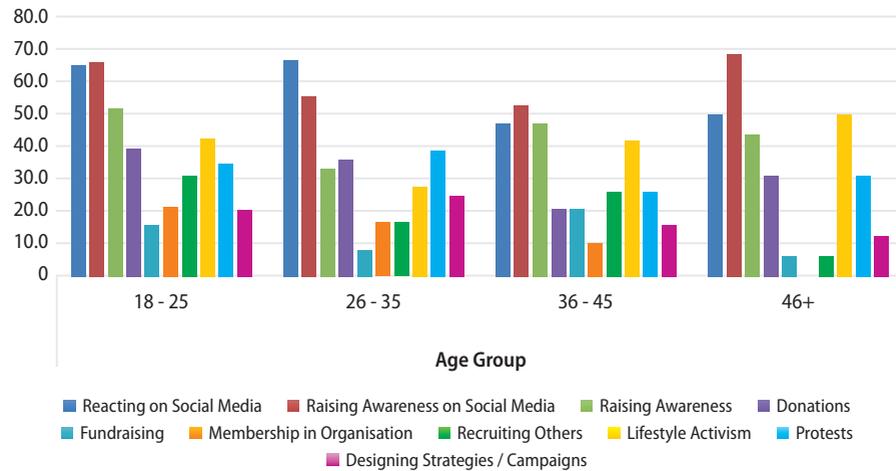


Figure 4.18 Activities engaged in by Gender

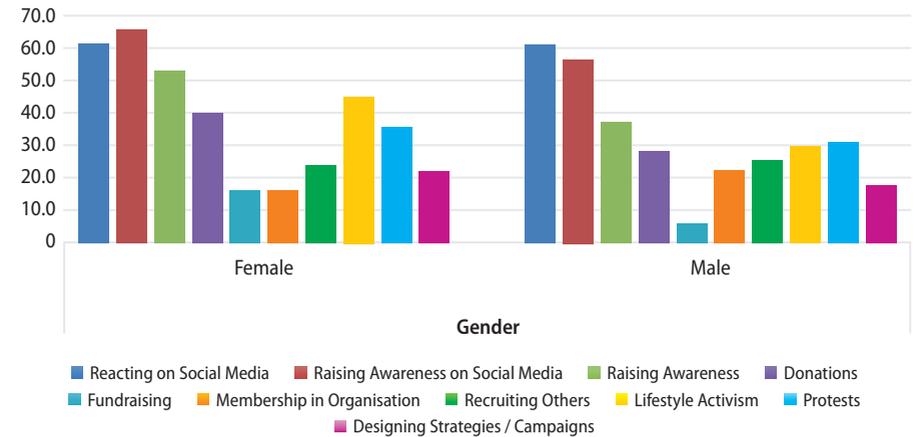


Figure 4.19 Activities engaged in by Post-Secondary Education

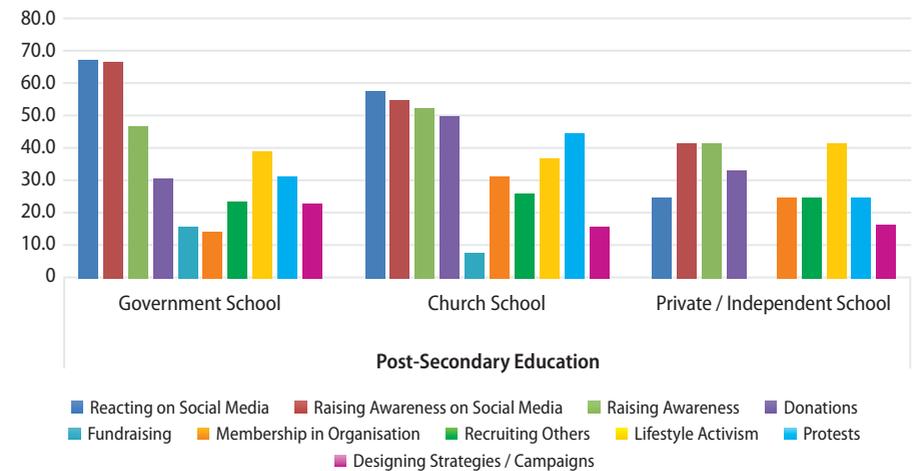


Figure 4.20 Activities engaged in by UM Attendance

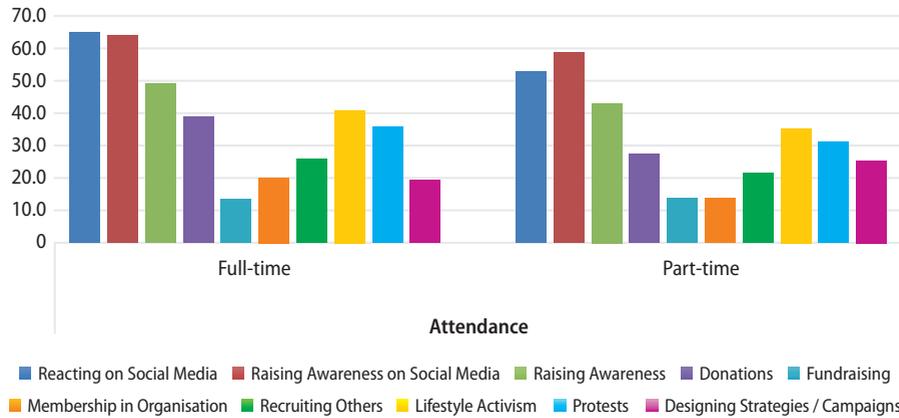
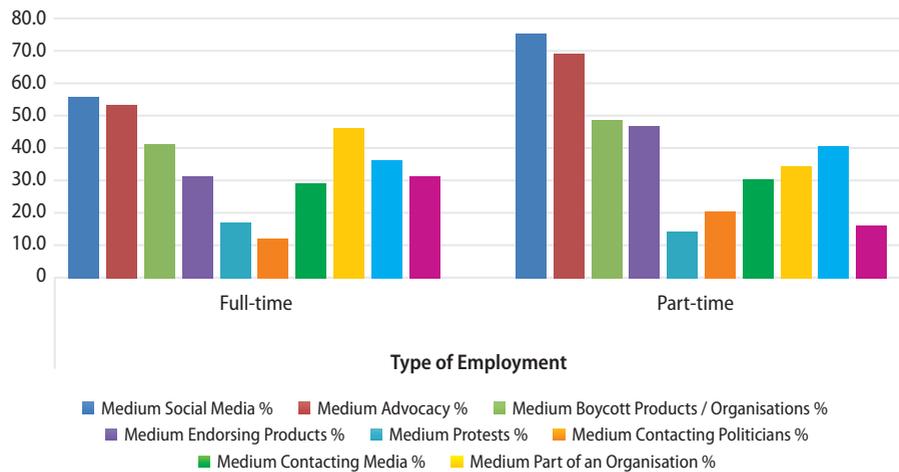


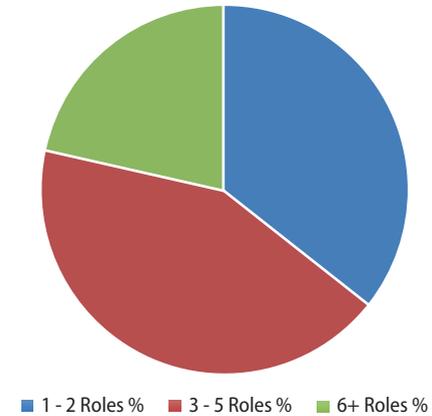
Figure 4.21 Activities engaged in by Type of Employment



Finally, the greatest percentage of respondents engaged in 3-5 different roles ($n = 76$, 42.9%), although the extent of the commitment involved for each activity cannot be determined through the data available. Moreover, just about a fifth of participants engaged in more than 6 different activities ($n = 38$, 21.5%), as shown in Figure 4.22.

Socio-demographic analysis is presented in Table 4.5. Young people were more likely to engage in more than three activities ($n = 77$, 72.6%) than other age groups. Men were more likely to engage in 1 – 2 activities ($n = 31$, 46.3%) when compared to their female counterparts. No different trends emerged based on participants' enrolment in post-secondary education, or their enrolment within the University of Malta. Moreover, those

Figure 4.22 Participants' Engagement through Multiple Roles



engaged in full-time employment were more likely to stick to 1-2 activities to express their activism ($n = 19$, 46.3%) contrary to those employed on a part-time basis as more than half engaged in 3 – 5 activities ($n = 26$, 53.1%).

Table 4.5 Socio-demographic by Number of Activities

Socio-demographic		1 - 2		3 - 5		6+		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age Group	18 - 25	29	27.4	53	50.0	24.0	22.6	106	100.0
	26 - 35	15	41.7	14	38.9	7.0	19.4	36	100.0
	36 - 45	10	52.6	5	26.3	4.0	21.1	19	100.0
	46+	9	56.3	4	25.0	3.0	18.8	16	100.0
Gender	Female	34	29.1	56	47.9	27.0	23.1	117	100.0
	Male	31	46.3	24	35.8	12.0	17.9	67	100.0
Post-Secondary Education	Government School	48	36.9	53	40.8	29.0	22.3	130	100.0
	Church School	10	26.3	20	52.6	8.0	21.1	38	100.0
	Private / Independent School	5	41.7	6	50.0	1.0	8.3	12	100.0
Attendance	Full-time	39	29.1	67	50.0	28.0	20.9	134	100.0
	Part-time	26	51.0	13	25.5	12.0	23.5	51	100.0
Type of employment	Full-time	19	46.3	10	24.4	12.0	29.3	41	100.0
	Part-time	12	24.5	26	53.1	11.0	22.4	49	100.0

4.1.4 Time Committed to Activism

Participants were also asked to quantify the hours they dedicated to activism on a monthly basis and the frequency of their activism. A quarter of participants in this study were active more than once a month ($n = 75, 25.8\%$), with about a fifth of respondents claiming that they were more active during particular periods ($n = 59, 20.1\%$). Similar patterns of frequency of activism based on different socio-demographic variables are presented in Figure 4.24, as most respondents tend to engage in civic participation more than once a month. Those who were engaged in a Church Institution for their post-secondary education were likely to be dedicated to activism more frequently than other cohorts.

Figure 4.23 Frequency of Activism

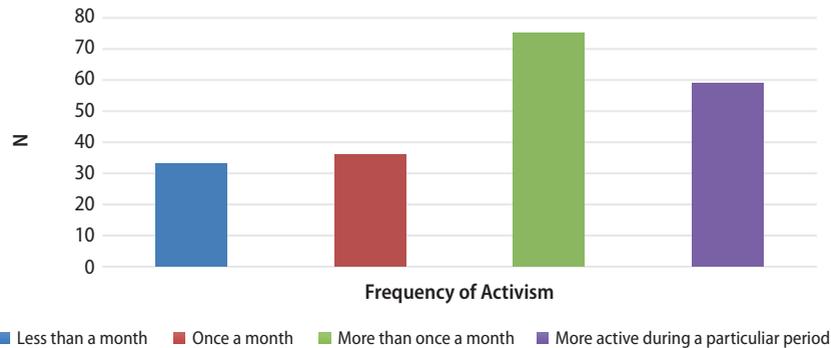


Figure 4.24 Frequency of Activism by Socio-demographic

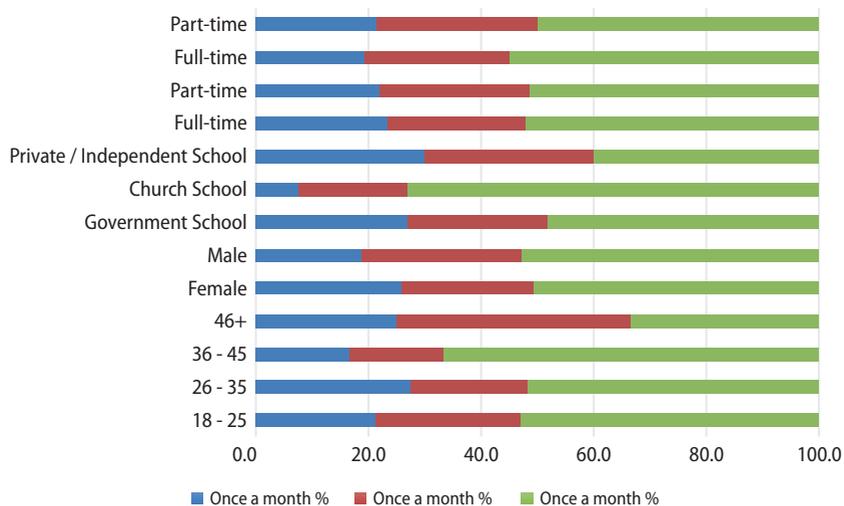


Figure 4.25 shows a good number of respondents ($n = 88, 30.2\%$) stating that they engaged in civic participation on an irregular basis. With regards to the regular hours committed by respondents presented in Figure 4.26, those who had attended an independent school for their post-secondary education answered that the minimum hours that they dedicate to activism was of 4 – 5 hours. No other different patterns emerged, with balance between hours within the different cohorts.

Figure 4.25 Hours of Activism per Month

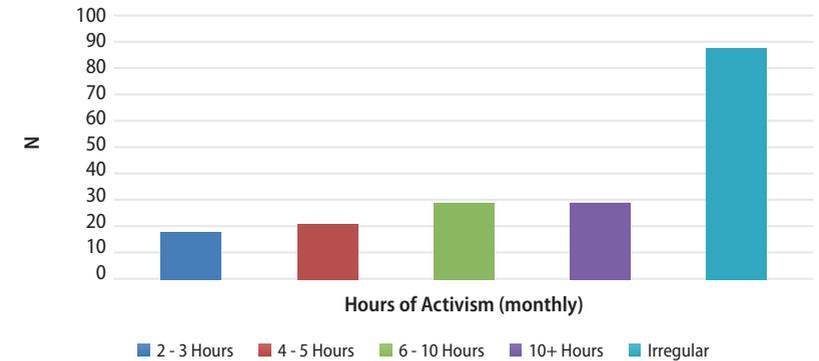
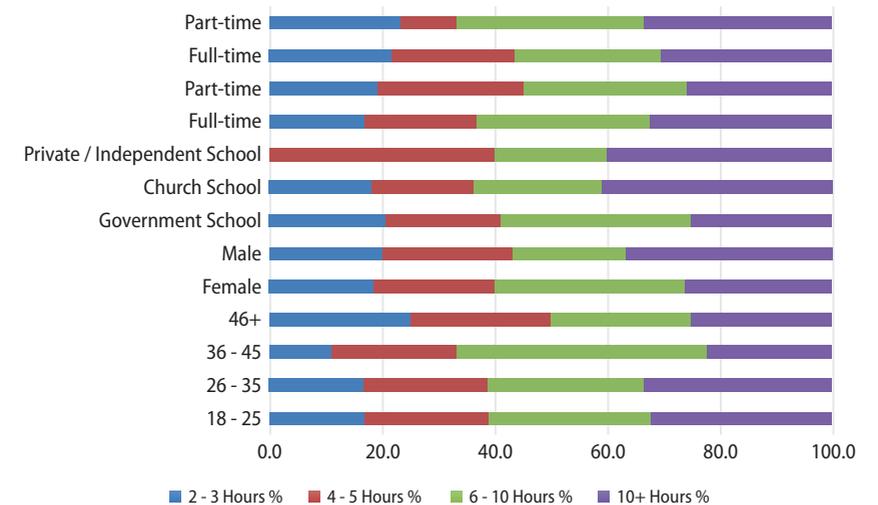


Figure 4.26 Hours of Activism per month by Socio-demographic



4.2 Factors that influence Activism amongst UM students.

To better understand the reasons behind one's participation or lack thereof, the questionnaire included lists of motives, barriers and reasons why the participants

stopped being involved. Answers were based on respondents' agreement or otherwise with the listed statements.

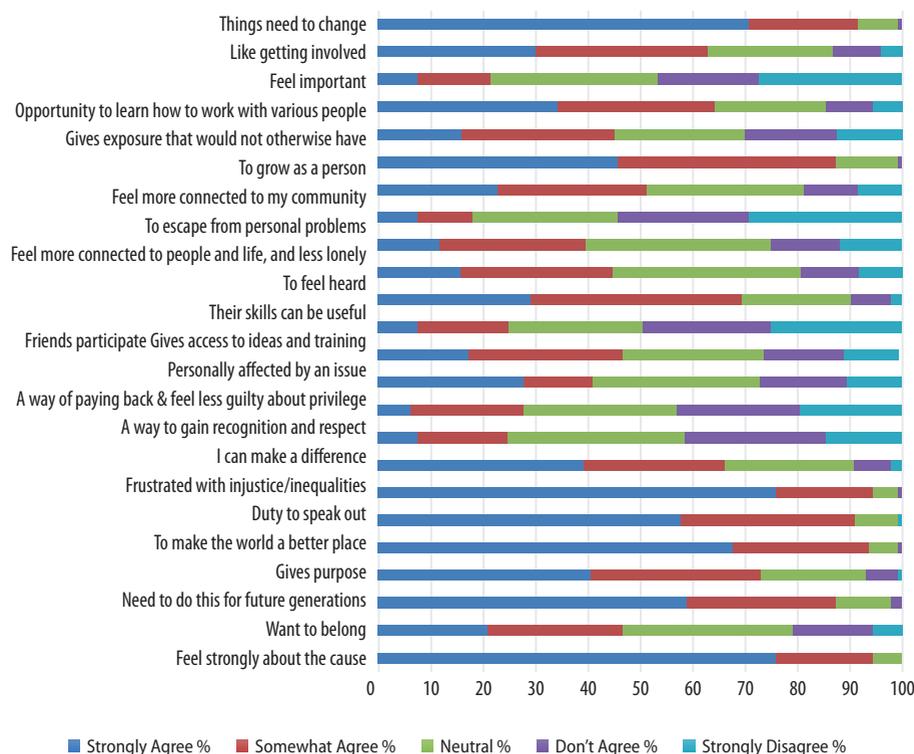
4.2.1 Motives for Participation

The reasons for which participants in the study engaged in active participation are presented in Figure 4.27. The strongest positive response was given to the following reasons:

- feeling strongly about the cause ($n = 111, 76\%$);
- being frustrated with injustice or inequalities ($n = 110, 75.9\%$);
- feeling that things need to change ($n = 102, 70.8\%$); and/or
- to make the world a better place ($n = 99, 67.8\%$).

Participants also felt that they had a duty to speak and to contribute for the future generation. Moreover, personal development, team work and contributing their skills to the cause were also given a positive response. Escaping personal problems, and friends' participation were the least common motivators given by participants, and neither were feeling important, and gaining recognition and respect.

Figure 4.27 Motives for Active Participation

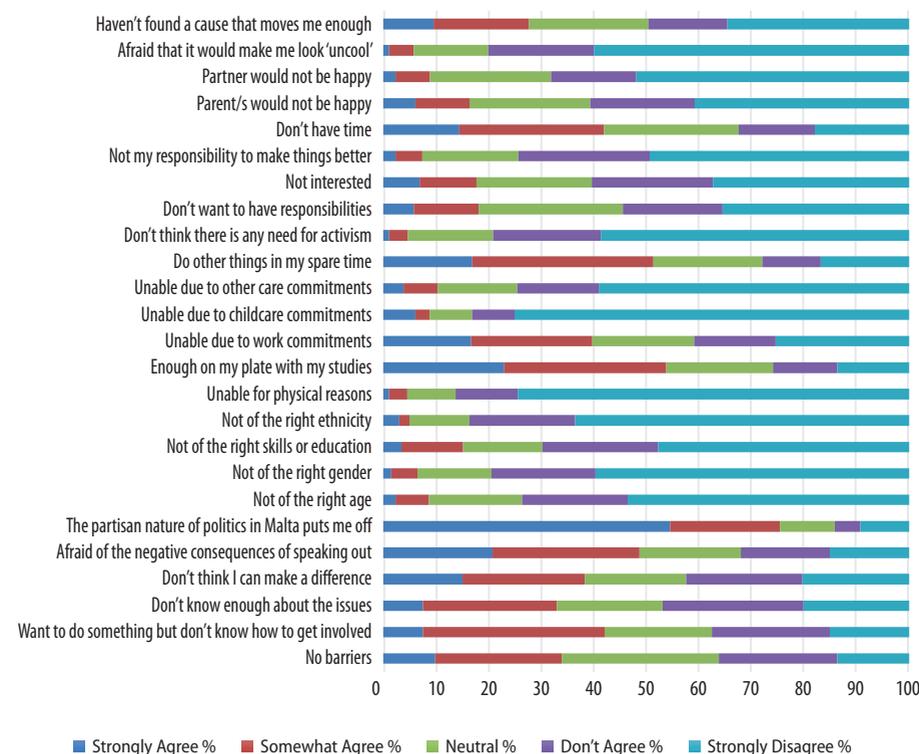


4.2.1 Barriers for Participation

Figure 4.28 shows the barriers which hinder respondents' participation in activism. The greatest hindrance for UM students to engage in civic participation is partisan politics, with three quarters of the respondents ($n = 202, 75.4\%$) claiming that the nature of partisan politics in Malta puts them off. A considerable number of participants were also concerned or fearful of negative consequences that could arise if they decided to speak out ($n = 129, 48.7\%$), rather than being concerned about impressions on others, with 208 participants (80%) disagreeing that they are afraid that activism would make them look 'uncool'. However, another major barrier to participation is having no time particularly as respondents seemed to already have their hands full with their studies ($n = 141, 53.8\%$), other commitments or hobbies ($n = 134, 51.3\%$), and work ($n = 105, 39.8\%$).

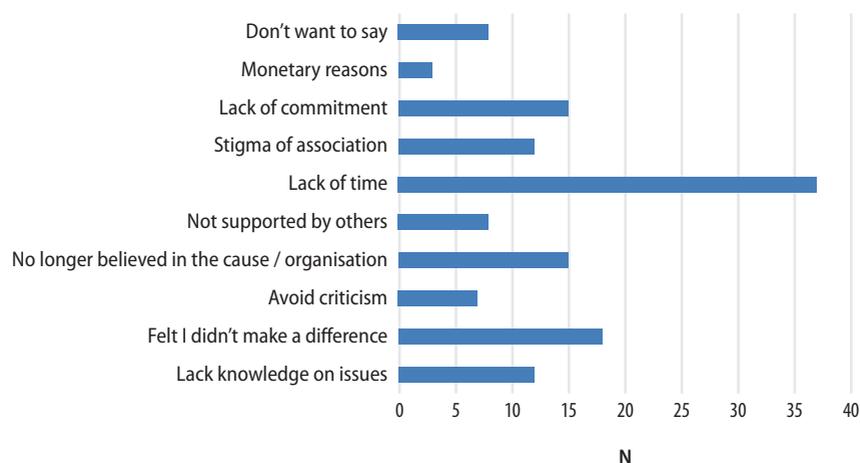
Findings from this question show that for most respondents, socio-demographic factors, such as their age, gender, and ethnicity do not impede on their participation. It is likely that there was a link between the few respondents who did say that they did not engage in participation because they did not have the right socio-demographic characteristics for activism, and their belonging to a minority group, although the data collected cannot confirm or deny this.

Figure 4.28 Barriers to Active Participation



Furthermore, some participants claimed that they were active before but had decided to stop, presented in Figure 4.29. They were asked for the reasons behind this decision. Lack of time was highlighted as the most common reason for discontinuing one's activism ($n = 37$), followed by feeling that they did not make a difference ($n = 18$), lack of commitment, and no longer believing in the cause and/or organisation ($n = 15$). Monetary reasons featured least as a reason to withdraw from activism ($n = 3$).

Figure 4.29 Reasons for participants to Stop Activism



As partisan politics and negative repercussions were perceived amongst the strongest barriers, some participants elaborated further on their thoughts. In terms of partisan politics, one respondent explained that:

I do not wish to be associated with the activists on the political sphere because they are mostly campaigning for their preferred party or are just contrarians. Most of them have no desire for any major change, they just critique whatever action the opposing party takes.

Additionally, even non-governmental organizations are not trusted in this regard as "[m]ost that have come up over the years always end up being tied to politics or other causes I disagree with or are duplicitous in their actions".

Two strong statements resonate with regards to fear of negative consequences:

The increase in online hate speech, especially in Malta, sometimes makes me fear speaking my mind especially on certain social media posts that I know for a fact tend to attract hate speech.

Fear that appearance and my past life choices, will be gossiped, scrutinised, and paraded on social media leading to a barrage of malicious verbal abuse

both virtually and in person which will almost certainly have a detrimental effect on my mental health. Simply put I hate being talked about.

Other reasons listed as barriers that discourage respondents from civic participation included not having "the willpower, desire, or the time to go out of my way to help the community which I do not even feel part of", while others claimed that they were excluded by an organization, stating that "[m]y offer to participate was refused by the organisation. Members formed a closed group. Not accepting different people", whereas others established that they were removed from a group due to having different opinions, "since I changed my opinion on something I got sidelined by a faction".

More psychological aspects were highlighted. Some claimed that they did not participate due to anxiety, which either hinders their participation or derives from news and problems make them "anxious about my future in an unhealthy way". Other psychological reasons included them being "really shy and find it hard to actively talk with others", or that they "don't have the confidence enough to showcase [their] voice in case [they are] put down by other stronger opinions". Some situations are even more complex, such is the case quoted below:

I am struggling myself, I have suffered a lot in my life, I can't go back to my country because I feel persecuted there, I turn 28, swimming in debt, considering suicide, lonely (although now I finally have a few friends), trying to start my career in Malta, trying to work on my mental health, trying to find a way to settle in another country so that I can gain another country's citizenship (one that aligns with my personality).

For some it was merely the way activism takes place that they did not approve of as they "don't feel that protests and cardboard slogans are the way to go. ... [T]hese kind of things are done for attention and never really solve anything". One of the respondents also expressed another form of activism which is more valid for them, claiming that they "would rather engage in making the world a better place through academic research". A similar barrier to this included not fitting in, with one participant stating: "I don't feel like there is a strong movement in Malta that I can follow", whereas another respondent felt that "[t]he Maltese culture at present isn't ready for the radical political and social change I advocate for".

Moreover, one respondent in this study claimed that "[t]here are enough active people. If everyone was an activist we'd have a civil war. I want to make the world better in other ways that frequently require me to take a neutral position." Additionally, there were those who felt helpless about where the world is at or its direction, stating that they "feel this world is going to sh*t and humans are stupid", and "don't believe in my country/politicians anymore", and that "[c]orruption worked its way through without any traces of hope. I just make myself better, but I don't care about others. Everyone is on his own in this." Helplessness and hopelessness featured also in terms of power to bring about change:

Even if one would be active, no change can really be certain. The best that a populace can do is speak up and hope that the government or someone in power can comply, but in Malta, either most of the people have one mindset or there is no back up from the people in government who are able to relay our outcry to Parliament.

4.2.2 Measures to Encourage Participation

At the end of the online survey, participants were asked about measures that would encourage them to be more active. Almost half of the respondents expressed that being provided with more information on how to be active ($n = 140$, 48.1%) would entice them. This was followed by “having more information on a cause or organisation” ($n = 120$, 41.2%) and having more access to information in general ($n = 88$, 30.2%). Non-monetary compensation, such as being given additional credits as part of their course, also received considerable positive response ($n = 82$, 28.2%). Table 4.6 below shows.

Table 4.6 Measures to Encourage Active Participation

Measures	N	%
More info on how to be active	140	48.1
More info on cause /org	120	41.2
More accessible information	88	30.2
Non-monetary compensation	82	28.2
Travel allowance	78	26.8
Leadership opportunities	77	26.5
Mentorship programme	74	25.4
Opportunities to socialise	72	24.7
Exchange programme in other country	67	23.0
Transportation	54	18.6
Childcare services	15	5.2

Additional initiatives mentioned that would entice participation include ideological teaching and the provision of support from observers. Furthermore, discussion of partisan politics and negative repercussions to speaking out were highlighted through suggestions referring to “[p]rotection from being discriminated against when it comes to employment and other opportunities / benefits”, “elimination of political/ social/professional backlash” and “[e]liminating the partisan nature of politics in Malta.”

Finally, one of the respondents suggested that “[p]eople need to feel things. Make people actually feel the consequences of bad decisions in the long term (e.g.: pollution) people think about these things in the abstract, but they don’t actually let it sink in.”

The discussion below refers to the literature highlighted and the various findings presented in the previous chapters, categorized by socio-demographic variables to establish patterns within social groups.

5.1 General Observations

Less than half of the respondents claimed to be active. Most respondents were engaged in 1 – 2 causes, with social and environmental causes being more common for activists to commit to when compared to educational, political and civic causes. No particular social group stood out to being more active in a multitude of causes.

Engagement through social media has become most common both as a medium and activity through which people express their activism, followed by membership in organisations; whereas contacting media and politicians has become much less popular, suggesting a shift from traditional to more contemporary approaches to civic participation, also incorporating activism with popular culture (Cho et al., 2020; Kaun & Uldam, 2018). The majority of respondents were active on more than three media platforms, with a greater percentage engaging through different activities.

A large number of participants were more active during particular periods or dedicated irregular hours to activism. This suggests an irregular pattern of commitment and dedication which could derive from particular times such as recent political instability, or the current COVID-19 pandemic, whereby one would feel that they needed to express their opinions or contribute more to society. It could also show that respondents are not willing to commit on a regular basis. Nonetheless, Cho et al. (2020) and Lochocki (2010) suggested that such episodic engagement could lead to deeper engagement and constitute the start of awareness and involvement.

While the largest majority of respondents did not feel that their socio-demographic characteristics influenced their level of participation, literature shows that activism varies based on gender and age (Briggs, 2008; European Commission, 2013; Landstedt et al., 2016), although other factors such as education, family and employment also influence one’s active role within society. To explore the impact that one’s socio-demographic characteristics have on their activism, we explored the correlation of a number of socio-demographic variables with participants’ activism. Age, gender, post-secondary education, their attendance at UM and type of employment were found to hold significant correlation with respondents’ activism.

5.2 Age

The rate of involvement of UM students decreased gradually with age, this could partially be due to the fact that people's commitments tend to increase with age, such that older individuals have less time and energy to spend on activism. This contradicts popular beliefs that young people are less active and carefree than people of previous generations (Norris, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Xenos et al., 2014).

Younger individuals were more likely to engage in an educational cause, whereas those who were 46 years or older were more inclined towards civic, environmental and/or animal rights. Those who attended University on a full-time basis also showed a similar pattern to younger students. Such findings indicate that one's context and priorities are essential for their activism, whereby young students, who are more likely to have their education set as a priority and whose attendance at the University was on a full-time basis, were more integrated and committed towards enhancing their University experience.

A shift in the forms of activism between generations was confirmed as findings highlighted what media students use to express their activism and what activities they engaged in. Social media is used as a medium for one's activism throughout all age groups, however contacting politicians was mostly highlighted by the 46+ cohort; which could show that younger respondents have less trust in institutions and politicians (Anderson et al., 2018; Cicognani et al., 2012). Use of social media is also considered as an activity through which respondents engaged in activism. Those aged between 26 – 35 years old were more likely to react to content, instead of raising awareness. Interestingly, giving donations is also a strong form of activism for the younger generation, especially when compared to 36 – 45 year old respondents who do not seem that inclined to donate money. This was an unexpected finding as young people may not have access to cash as much as people from the older generations. Additionally, younger respondents used a greater diversity of platforms to express their activism and commit to a variety of activities when compared to other age groups, which could also derive due to increasing commitments over age which limits one's activism.

Having adopted an approach whereby forms of activism was not limited to traditional channels as identified by Smith et al. (2005), this study has shown that new technology has in fact broadened opportunities for activism. Moreover, the level of commitment and involvement on online media platforms needs to be explored further to avoid a trend whereby people feel they are contributing to society, hence having a sense of fulfilment experienced through activism, with no real and effective societal change being implicated; resulting in *clicktivism* (Cho et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019) and *slacktivism* (Barbarà et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019).

Ultimately, with youth being a sensitive age for the development of one's identity, intervention at such a tender age is vital to enable a positive civic persona; especially since these transformative years allow for youth to freely explore avenues of identity formation.

5.3 Gender

With regards to gender, women were significantly more likely to be active than men. Women were more likely to engage in social and environmental causes, compared

to men who were more active in social and political activism. Similar patterns emerged between genders when exploring the use of different media, whereas women were more likely to engage through lifestyle activism, donating money and raising funds, contrary to men. Furthermore, men were less likely to engage in more than two activities, while there was no gender disparities identified with regards to the time dedicated to activism. Such findings are consistent with literature which suggests that women seemed to focus more on private matters and cause-oriented involvement which could be incorporated in one's daily routines (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010).

Literature also shows differences in participation amongst young men and women, which is essential to discuss in light of the scope of this research project. While young women are thought to be less interested in activism (Briggs, 2008; Cicognani et al., 2012), Booth-Tobin & Han (2010) found that while they are interested, they tend to express their political interest less. Differences found in the current study with regards to the cause through which individuals of either genders committed to are also relevant for young people (Booth-Tobin & Han, 2010; Lawless & Fox, 2013), with young men being more likely to engage in campaign-oriented and confrontational activities (Briggs, 2008; Cicognani et al., 2012; Electoral Commission, 2004). Moreover, the European Commission (2018b) reported the widest gender gap between boys and girls, with boys scoring 38 points lower than girls, in civic knowledge.

Such differences can be explained through the political socialisation process whereby gender roles and stereotypes are passed from one generation to another through multiple social institutions (Scott & Marshall, 2009), which has implications on one's interests, competences and abilities (Cicognani et al., 2012).

5.4 Education

Educational and religious institutions also feature as having implications on one's activism (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Crocetti et al., 2014; D'Agostino & Visser, 2010; Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010), as they may provide opportunities for individuals to serve their communities. In fact, there was a significant relation between post-secondary education and respondents' active involvement, with those attending church schools being more likely to be active than their counterparts enrolled in independent or government educational institutions. Those who attended a religious educational institute were more likely to use 3 – 5 media to express their activism, engage in demonstrations and/or protests, and were committed more frequently. Interestingly, difference in civic knowledge was also highlighted in the literature discussed (European Commission, 2018b, Ministry for Education & Employment, 2016).

Additionally, more of those who attended a private/ independent post-secondary education were involved in civic activism, in comparison to those who attended government and church schools for their post-secondary education, with those attending church schools being more active in educational and political causes. Moreover, participation on social media drops being replaced by lifestyle activism amongst students who attended a private school, in comparison to those having attended at a government institution.

One could question whether such patterns emerge due to religious values predisposing individuals to act more selflessly and engage in more activism. However, such findings

could also be a result of a particular ethos of the educational institution, environmental factors or differences in the curriculum, whereby students would be further empowered to participate in civil society. A difference in socioeconomic backgrounds (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016) and opportunities to express one's activism on school grounds and a stronger sense of belonging within their educational community, could also result in students having a lesser need to opt for cheaper and more accessible platforms such as social media.

Additionally, while education may have implications on one's choices for civic engagement, research also suggests that activism provides students with a context to their learning and development through bridging the gap between academic and social spheres, enhancing academic advancement, promoting identity development (Kirshner, 2007; Zeldin, 2004), and shifting one's attention from individual to collective attainment (Bandura, 1999). This leaves much to be desired, with hindrance to one's access to opportunities that could enhance their activism, and therefore limiting them from developing their potential as leaders, possibly acting as an injustice towards students enrolled within different educational institutions, especially governmental institutions.

With educational institutions having such an essential role on one's development, and political socialisation (Scott & Marshall, 2009), inclusion of and main streaming civic education is vital to enable an equal playing field for the development of students' civic identity at a young age (Pace Gasan, 2016; Rochira et al., 2019). Additionally, civic and citizenship programmes tend to enhance youth engagement (Flanagan, 2009) as they learn more about societal challenges and opportunities through which they could contribute to (Branson, 2003; Cho et al., 2020; Flanagan, 2009). One has to also refer to and understand critique of existing practices which suggest that they are system- and stability-oriented (Flanagan, 2009; Massing 1999 as cited in Yoldas, 2015), while teaching of historical events and current affairs through non-biased lenses, and skills such as communication, critical and creative thinking, together with opportunity for meaningful engagement may encourage further space for dialogue, exploration and activism.

5.5 Attendance & Type of Employment

Students studying full-time would presumably be less likely to also be in full time employment. In fact, multiple reversed patterns emerged from mode of attendance within UM and the type of employment. Furthermore, students enrolled with UM on a full-time basis were significantly more likely to engage in activism than students enrolled on a part-time basis. A significant association was also found for employment type, whereby students engaged in part-time employment were more likely to engage in activism, compared to students engaged in full-time employment. Those who attended University on a full-time basis or worked on a part-time basis were also more likely to be active on more than three media or activities, when compared to their counterparts.

Of the participants who were enrolled in their studies on a full-time basis, activism involving an educational cause was more prominent, whereas a shift to civic activism was highlighted amongst those studying at UM on a part-time basis. Furthermore, those working on a part-time basis were more likely to give donations and engage in organisations, while they were less likely than those who are employed on a full-time basis to adopt lifestyle activism. Such

observations could result due to the individuals' context, whereby those enrolled with UM on a full-time basis tend to spend more time on campus and prioritise challenges related to their education, whereas those involved in full-time employment have more limited time and therefore incorporate their activism in daily routines, an approach referred to by literature which women tend to adopt more (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010).

Other commitments limit one's time to do other things; however, when testing for time and frequency, there were no particular patterns emerging. Yet, time did feature as the third main barrier to civic engagement, as respondents had other commitments, such as those related to studies, employment, other hobbies or responsibilities. Lack of time and commitment were also the main reasons why those who were previously engaged in activism did not continue doing so; possibly having felt that their lack of regular contribution or availability hindered the team's process.

5.6 Other Factors influencing Active Participation

The study tried to further understand the reasons behind one's activism or lack thereof. Those who do not engage in civil society are not inactive because of their apathy, as many still seem to feel responsible for making society a better place, but due to the partisan culture surrounding dialogue, activism and being critical of what is happening. In fact, partisan politics was highlighted as the greatest barrier to activism, especially when partisanship influences many discussions on a multitude of areas in a bi-polar country such as Malta.

One comment establishing that there are enough active people or otherwise there would be civil war if everyone was active, also raises concerns on the perceptions on activism. Primarily, one could think that more people are active than actually are. A second concern would be that disagreement is considered to cause conflict rather than compromise, resolution, innovation and more representative outcomes. Such statement could also be an act of justifying one's lack of involvement.

Moreover, respondents were hindered from being active due to their fear of negative consequences, feeling helpless and with no power to make actual change. Again, context is essential to consider, as in a small island, many people are interrelated or know each other. This may lead to students being more concerned on any possible negative repercussions on their education and employment in case they tend to criticise or disagree with the status quo; with a simple risk assessment leading them to believe that they have more to lose than to gain. Nonetheless, it is essential that students are empowered to voice their concerns and opinions beyond political parties and formal institutions.

As literature suggests, youth have moved away from formal institutions towards non-governmental organisations or informal platforms and/or practices, such as social media and lifestyle activism, as their interest in the world around them persists (Azzopardi, 2012; Briggs, 2008; Quéniart and Jacques, 2010). This is consistent with findings that show that young people are less likely to contact politicians as a form of activism. Moreover, one of the participants also felt preoccupied by the thought that even non-governmental organisations seem to be tied up with politics. These factors may very well be understood through the lack of trust and belonging expressed by respondents in this study, and

further comments making reference to corruption; which feelings of uncertainty and doubt having possibly been further enticed through recent political events.

While many seem to be opting for social media to express their activism, concerns still arise with the increase of online hate speech, as this also entices fear for one to speak their minds especially on topics that are more likely to attract such hate speech. While recent regulations have led to the protection from hate speech in a variety of aspects, there still needs to be more awareness of what constitutes as hate speech and how to take action against it. Another fear that arises from the use of social media is that one's past is used as a means to suppress one's opinions, which would have a detrimental affect on the mental well-being of those involved. These dynamics may further reflect a general inability to hold a constructive dialogue with the possibility of having opposing opinions without having to resort to hate speech or other forms of aggressive behaviour.

Additionally, an increasingly disconnected society seems to be creating a vicious cycle, where people feel excluded and forgotten by the society which they form part of, driving them towards further isolation; and with no interest, desire or motivation to contribute towards the betterment of society. One has to also keep in mind the context for this research, whereby students at tertiary educational level tend to be more accomplished and empowered; and yet, trends of isolation and alienation from civic engagement persist. Contrary, for those who are active being a part of an organisation is still assigned a great value, and therefore showing a stronger sense of belonging, which is also considered as a strong motivator for civic engagement (Azzopardi, 2012; Delli Carpini, 2000; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). This suggests that activism is not only important for representative policies, but also for the social well-being of the individual.

While barriers are an essential element to look at while discussing civil engagement, so too are motives and reasons why people tend to opt to or desire to be active. The strongest motives identified were feeling strongly about the cause, frustration with injustice or inequalities, and a desire for betterment. These were followed by a sense of duty to speak up and to contribute for the sake of future generations. Such motives are considered to be intrinsic motivational factors, as they lead for activism to be pursued for its own sake, contrary to extrinsically rewarding activities which are pursued because of rewards that are not an inherent part of that activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic or internalised motivators were found to have a long-term effect on one's activism as this allows for one's realization of their duty to act and confidence that their actions contribute to the bigger picture (Poskitt & Bonney, 2016; Texas State, 2013).

Extrinsic motivational factors which also act as motivators, with less influence than those previously mentioned are related to one's development on a personal and societal level, whereby gaining skills and contributing through one's abilities were both valued as motives for engagement.

Having a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors is essential in order to be able to encourage participation through different means, possibly using extrinsic motivators to entice engagement which could then be internalised. Moreover, Poskitt & Bonney (2016) found that internalizing motivation throughout the formative years of adolescence can lead an individual to embrace activism that lasts a life-time.

Finally, as students in this study were asked to recommend what measures they felt would help them be more active, information on how to be active and about causes and/or organisations, as well as such information to be accessible were the most voted measures. This confirms the impact that lack of appropriate civic education has on students' activism with just about half of the respondents potentially showing their lack of awareness of where to start.



6

Conclusion

Being active is still not a common trend amongst UM students, yet this study shows that the prevalence of activism has not necessarily diminished with younger generations. Rather activism has changed in the way it is expressed, the level of commitment and the media used to contribute to society.

This study has highlighted that individuals are more likely to be active on social media, with concerns rising with regards to the extent and nature of such engagement, as well as the actual impact that social media activism has. Further exploration in the dynamics with regards to the use of social media for activism would give better insights on how young people are making use of different technological platforms.

Literature discussed in this study shows that the political socialization (Scott & Marshall, 2009) process has a great influence on one's decision towards activism throughout youth and also at a later stage in life. From the empirical data collected, age, gender, post-secondary education, and students' enrolment at UM or their type of employment were the socio-demographic characteristics found to have a significant relationship with activism. While the current study did not allow for further light to be shed on the role of the family, literature shows the important role that such social institution has in the socialisation process of children and youth (Cicognani et al., 2012; Haralambos, et al., 2004; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Thus, strengthening the understanding of families with regards to the benefits of activism at a young age is essential for support throughout these formative years. Gendered socialization leads to disabling young women from striving towards being active, voicing their opinions and contributing through active participation. Moreover, post-secondary education and the lack of consistency in terms of civic education and opportunities between government, private and/or religious educational institutions also impacts one's activism amongst tertiary level students. Such discrepancy could result in further inequalities in the long-term, which gaps could be even greater when comparing students at tertiary level education and those who do not make it this far in educational structures.

Activism also feeds in a sense of belonging and effort towards the collective good rather than promoting self-centredness and isolation. Opportunities for people to come together and invest their time towards the betterment of society has invaluable positive repercussions on the development of younger generations.

Furthermore, while students seek alternative media to traditional ways of activism, a lack of trust in institutions and politicians, and young people moving away from such democratic platforms is also worrying. We need to restore trust in institutions and

politicians, reclaim the role of politicians as decision-makers who are elected by the people for the people, and educate the general public further about their rights, responsibilities and opportunities with regards to contributing to the decision-making processes that influence our lives.

Moreover, the biggest barriers to activism are partisan politics and lack of information, with Maltese youth scoring far lower than the international average on civic knowledge (European Commission, 2018b). The greatest motives for activism were found to be intrinsic motivators centred around strong feelings about a cause, injustices and/or inequalities and the need for things to change. Promoting civic and citizenship education and awareness about the different realities and causes that one could contribute to would be an essential element in driving a cultural change with regards to partisanship in Malta; possibly encouraging more young people to engage in civic, social and political dialogue.

More initiatives aimed at encouraging youth to be active, to realize that their contribution counts, and opportunities where they could hold decision-makers accountable to finding solutions and implementing good ideas, are needed. Young people are evidently highly active on social media platforms, meaning that these tools can be used productively in an effort to reach this target group and encourage meaningful engagement.

The ultimate aim of activism is to find solutions to long-term problems, whether those problems are related to young age or any other aspect of our societies. Looking at different methods to integrate activism in one's life and through already existing commitment is essential, especially when a shift to lifestyle activism is becoming more common. Feeling that one can contribute and put forward their ideas, as well as making social dialogue and participation accessible for persons of different ages, genders and socioeconomic backgrounds is vital to ensure a representative society, but more so to ensure that all of society's resources are used to find such solutions.

6.1 Recommendations for Research

1. A **national study** representative of the youth population that will allow for further insights on modern youth activism amongst all young people. A larger sample would also allow for examining the impact of intersectionality on active engagement.
2. Exploring attitudes and behaviours within family background with an attempt to further the **understanding of the family's role** throughout childhood, adolescence and youth in encouraging participation.
3. A comparative study focusing on students attending other tertiary level educational institutions beyond University of Malta, which could highlight **differences at tertiary level of education** and thus exploring different factors which could impact the activism of youth.
4. An exploratory study within educational institutions to better understand **what environmental or social factors influence the gap in civic knowledge and activism between government, independent and religious educational**

institutions. Such study would also highlight good practices that can be introduced in other schools.

5. **Identifying civic and citizenship educational programmes or opportunities in Malta**, and examining them through a critical lens with the scope of strengthening such learning opportunities for young people.
6. Further research in understanding **the nature and extent of activism amongst marginalized youth** is needed. A study focusing solely on this target group would ensure that even underprivileged youth are engaged and have the opportunity to contribute to society.
7. A study aimed at **exploring local, national or international social innovations** implemented with the scope of addressing barriers to youth participation. Such study could lead to an evidence-based good practice handbook to be utilised by those interested in addressing this challenge, such as non-governmental organisations.
8. An exploratory study intended to better understand **the impact of partisanship and political discourse as barriers** towards youth participation.
9. More longitudinal studies are needed **to identify whether youth engagement continues into adulthood**, and if interests or means of engagement remain the same or shaped differently by the ageing process.
10. A longitudinal study on **the impact of a crisis**, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has **on active engagement** amongst children and young people.
11. **The impact of social media on youth participation** needs to be examined further. How do the constant messages received through such platforms influence young people's outlook towards political, civic and social engagement? How are young people utilising social media to express themselves and especially to be active? Why do young people tend to resort to social media activism more? What does this say about their activism? Insights on the impact of hate speech and fear of negative repercussions on social media need to be looked into.
12. A better understanding of the impact of social media activism is vital. **Are policy-makers influenced by social media activism?** How can we ensure that activism on social media platforms is both meaningful and impactful?
13. **An exploratory study on how digital platforms can be better used to encourage youth activism.** How can we use this to develop structured methods to ensure meaningful engagement where students / youth could contribute their ideas, receive feedback and view progress on their ideas being implemented.
14. A **foresight exercise on how activism will look like in the future** due to the

impact of modern societal challenges, current global political and economic instability, flaws highlighted through the COVID-19 pandemic, and ever-changing technology, demographics and social values.

6.2 Recommendations for Policy

1. A **public campaign** to entice political, civic or social activism **targeted towards different social groups** based on the emerging findings of this study.
2. A **national awareness raising campaign targeting parents** of youth and adolescents on the benefits of activism on the development of young people enables families to better understand the importance of civic engagement, potentially strengthening family support to seek opportunities and knowledge on activism.
3. **Create space for intergenerational dialogue** amongst youth seeking to learn more about activism, and adults and elderly who have pioneered change through their civic engagement.
4. Lobby for **further investment in civic and citizenship educational curricula** in government educational institutes.
5. Establish an **early intervention programme** amongst primary education students to **heighten awareness of the positives of engagement** and the various forms of being active that are available to children and young people.
6. **Mainstream mandatory civic education** focusing on societal, political and civic history, challenges and opportunities for engagement throughout secondary and post-secondary schooling.
7. Integrate active participative behaviour through teaching of skills and practices, such as questioning, dialogue and research, by **allowing students to be more active in the classroom from a young age**.
8. Consider **setting up 'participation spaces'** to recruit students from secondary, post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions, where young people can come together in a semi-structured forum, to discuss matters of interest to them and take these forward to the appropriate authorities.
9. **Mainstream education on societal, political and civic challenges amongst different courses at the University of Malta**, to encourage idea generation for possible solutions to long-term challenges, and thus integrating activism through education, across all disciplines.
10. Provide **non-monetary rewards** throughout post-secondary and tertiary education, such as extra credits or compensating for lost credits, to encourage seeking opportunities to learn about injustices, inequalities and other modern challenges, and to engage in activism.
11. **Establish a "Share Your Ideas" programme** or friendly competition for tertiary level students to present ideas generated through their studies to be presented to policy-makers.
12. Provide **opportunities for structured dialogue and debates** that encourage those who are not usually engaged to participate and put forward their ideas. Such opportunities should also emphasize the importance of networking and building one's social capital.
13. **Organize an activism fair** to promote networking, collaboration and opportunities to learn about activism and become more active. Such fair would bring together a number of organisations to exhibit their work, and can also feature a number of awareness sessions on different causes which might interest persons who have never managed to be involved due to lack of information.
14. **Encourage the active participation of marginalized youth** by ensuring that feedback and ideas shared through existing targeted programmes and services are forwarded to respective authorities.
15. Ensure that **young people interested in engaging in a political party are exposed to mandatory unbiased civic educational programme**.
16. Educate civic and political organisations on how to truly create youth engagement and carry out youth-focused outreach.
17. Establish **funding support programmes for young people** to submit their proposals and develop projects of civic impact, which also allow space for youths to develop their capacities as activists and to be supported by a mentor.
18. Make better use of **social media to raise awareness and enhance knowledge about societal challenges and opportunities for engagement**.
19. **Promote social media as a tool for meaningful activism**, and challenge ideas of *clicktivism* and *slacktivism*. This should include the promotion of digital literacy through training opportunities for critical and creative thinking which incorporates a better understanding on how to utilize social media better to raise awareness, engage in meaningful discussion and reach decision-makers.
20. **Address hate speech as a barrier to online activism**, through awareness raising of what constitutes as hate speech, where one could report such behaviours, and further encouraging dialogue without aggressive behaviour and/or personal attacks.
21. **Create digital opportunities for meaningful engagement through an open innovation platform** which would bridge between the unstructured nature of social media activism and the need to contribute through democratic institutions.

22. Establish a medium which could **monitor the progress of ideas presented by young people which have been taken on board by policy-makers**, with the intent to ensure accountability and strengthen the relationship between youth and politicians.
23. **Mainstream youth involvement in different levels of decision-making** through the appointment of a diverse group of young people on different committees and boards, based on youths' interests, knowledge and/or personal experience.
24. **Better structure the role of youth representatives in Local Councils**, through the creation of a non-partisan mentoring programme focusing on community leadership.
25. **Involve Local Councils in encouraging youth activities and youth groups**, including the handing off of the management and setting up of the group to the youths themselves, accompanied by mentorship throughout, to encourage involvement, speaking out and participation.
26. Drive **change in discourse** from focusing on lack of participation and apathy by putting the onus on youth, to make participation more accessible with responsibility falling on local and national policy-makers and democratic institutions.
27. Ensure that all programmes and policy measures undertaken **cater for diverse realities and needs** of young women and men, as well as marginalized youth.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Online Survey

Youth Civic Involvement Measure Questionnaire

The Faculty for Social Well-being together with the Aġenzija Żgħażaġh wishes to look into civic engagement among University students. Civic engagement means working together to make a difference and promote the quality of our communities. We are distributing this questionnaire to all students at the University of Malta in order to examine patterns, motivators and barriers to youth civic involvement. Thank you for helping us with our study.

By continuing with the questionnaire, I confirm that I have read the information and consent to participating in this study.

Section A - Demographic Information

1. How old are you? _____

2. Gender: *Tick only one.* Female Male Other

3. What region of Malta do you live in. *Tick all that apply.*

- Gozo and Comino Region
- Northern Harbour Region: Birkirkara; Gżira; Hal Qormi; Hamrun; Msida; Pembroke; San Ġwann; Santa Venera; St Julian's; Swieqi; Ta' Xbiex; Tal-Pietà; Tas-Sliema.
- Southern Harbour Region: Cospicua; Fgura; Floriana; Hal Luqa; Haż-Żabbar; Kalkara; Marsa; Paola; Santa Luċija; Senglea; Hal Tarxien; Valletta; Vittoriosa; Xgħajra South
- Eastern Region: Birżebbuġa; Gudja; Hal Għaxaq; Hal Kirkop; Hal Safi; Marsaskala; Marsaxlokk; Mqabba; Qrendi; Żejtun; Żurrieq
- Western Region: Had-Dingli; Hal Balzan; Hal Lija; H'Attard; Haż-Żebbuġ; Iklin; Mdina; Mtarfa; Rabat; Siġġiewi
- Northern Region: Hal Għargħur; Mellieħa; Mgarr; Mosta; Naxxar; St Paul's Bay

4. What primary school did you attend? *Tick only one.*

- Government School
- Church School
- Private/Independent School

5. What secondary school did you attend? *Tick only one.*

- Government School
- Church School
- Private/Independent School

6. What post-secondary institution did you attend? *Tick only one.*

- Government School
- Church School
- Private/Independent School

7. What Faculty are you studying with? *Tick all that apply.*

- Arts
- Built Environment
- Dental Surgery
- Economics, Management and Accountancy
- Education
- Engineering
- Health Sciences
- Information and Communication Technology
- Laws
- Media and Knowledge Sciences
- Medicine and Surgery
- Science
- Social Well-being
- Theology
- Other

8. What type of course are you studying for? *Tick only one.*

- Diploma Course
- First Degree
- MA
- PhD
- Other:

9. Is your course full-time or part-time? *Tick all that apply.*

- Full-time
- Part-time

10. Do you do any paid work apart from your studies? *Tick all that apply.*

- Yes
- No

11. If yes, what kind of work do you do? (You may tick more than one option)

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Self-employed
- Freelance
- Seasonal work
- Other:

12. Who do you live with? Tick only one.

- Both parents
- One parent
- One parent and their partner
- Live with partner
- Live with house-mates
- Live alone
- Other:

13. Parents' marital status: Tick only one.

- Married
- Separated or divorced
- Single parent household
- Unmarried, two parent household
- Other:

14. Parents' level of education - Mother/Parent 1 Tick all that apply.

- Primary level
- Secondary level
- Tertiary level
- Post graduate level
- Other:

15. Parents' level of education - Father/Parent 2 Tick all that apply.

- Primary level
- Secondary level
- Tertiary level
- Post graduate level
- Other:

16. Nationality/ Cultural Background: Tick all that apply.

- Maltese
- EU National
- Non-EU European
- USA/Canada
- Indian Subcontinent
- Middle East/Turkey/North Africa
- Africa
- Asia
- New Zealand/Australia
- South or Central America
- Other:

17. What is the main language spoken at home? Tick only one.

- Maltese
- English
- Other

SECTION B - Civic Involvement

1. The Oxford English Dictionary describes activism as “The policy of active participation or engagement in a particular sphere of activity; spec. the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change” Are you currently engaged in any activism as described above? *Tick only one.*

- Yes
- No (Skip to question 26)
- I give my time to a cause on an individual level - lobbying, on social media etc. Used to be an activist, but not anymore

2. If you used to be active but stopped, why do you think this is? *Tick all that apply.*

- Not relevant to me, as I am actively engaged.
- I didn't know enough about the issues
- I didn't feel that my actions would make a difference
- I did not want to be criticised for my actions or opinions
- I no longer believed in the cause/organisation
- I did not feel supported by other activists/the organisation
- Lack of time
- Due to stigma of association
- Lack of commitment
- Due to monetary reasons
- Do not want to say

3. What sort of cause are you active in? *Tick all that apply.*

- Educational - e.g. KSU, Faculty Organisation or other
- Political
- Civic, e.g. issues related to your hometown or community
- Social Focus, e.g. Immigrant issues, social rights initiatives, etc
- Environmental/Animal Rights
- Other:

4. How do you express your activism? *Tick all that apply.*

- Active on social media platform/s
- Advocacy - i.e. the public and vocal support of an issue or cause
- Boycotting products or organisations
- Endorsing/using only products that align with my beliefs
- Taking part in Protests/Demonstrations
- Contacting politicians to forward my beliefs
- Contacting media (newspapers, TV or radio) to put forward my beliefs
- Being part of an organisation
- Other:

5. What is your level of involvement? *Tick all that apply.*

- Reacting to issues on social media
- Raising awareness about issues/causes on social media
- Raising awareness (other than social media)
- Donating money for a group or cause
- Raising money
- Membership only in an organisation
- Recruiting other participants/members to the cause
- Lifestyle activism - where my choices of food, clothing, consumption, etc, is in line with my beliefs
- Taking part in demonstrations/protests
- Helping to design campaigns/strategies
- Other:

6. In the last year, how frequently have you been active? *Tick all that apply.*

- Once a month
- More than once a month
- Less than once a month
- More active during a particular period

7. How many hours a month would you say that you dedicate to your activism?

Tick only one.

- 2-3 hours a month
- 4-5 hours a month
- 6-10 Hours a month
- More than 10 hours a month
- Irregularly, when I feel compelled to engage
- Other:

SECTION C - Examination of Motivators for Activism:

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:
I participate because... *Tick only one per row.*

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Don't Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel strongly about the issue/cause.					
I want to belong.					
I feel that I need to do this for future generations.					
It gives me purpose.					
I would like to make the world a better place.					
I feel that I have a duty to speak out.					
I get frustrated with injustice/inequalities.					
I feel that I can make a difference.					
It is a way to gain recognition and respect.					
It is my way of paying back, I feel less guilty about being better off.					
I, or someone close to me, has been affected by an issue and now I want to do something to help.					
It gives me access to ideas and training.					
My friends participate.					
I know that my skills can be useful.					
It makes me feel heard.					
I feel more connected to people and life, I feel less lonely.					
It helps me escape from personal problems.					
I feel more connected to my community.					
It helps me grow as a person.					
it provides me with exposure that I would not otherwise have.					
It gives me the opportunity to learn how to work with a variety of people					
It makes me feel important.					
I like getting involved.					
I feel that things need to change.					

SECTION D - Examinations of Barriers to Activism:

1. Please rate how strongly you agree with the following statements: I am not engaged in activism because... *Tick only one per row.*

	Very True	Somewhat true	Neutral	Not very true	Not true at all
I don't feel that there are any barriers that hinder my participation in activism.					
I'd like to do something but don't know how to get involved.					
I don't know enough about the issues.					
I don't think I can make a difference.					
I am afraid of the negative consequences of speaking out.					
The partisan nature of politics in Malta puts me off.					
I don't think I'm the right age.					
I don't think I'm the right gender.					
I don't think I have the right skills or education.					
I don't think I have the right ethnicity.					
I am unable for physical reasons.					
I already have enough on my plate with my studies.					
I am unable due to work commitments.					
I am unable because of childcare commitments.					
I am unable due to other care commitments for a relative/family member (not children).					
I do other things in my spare time (other than study or work).					
Our country is doing quite well, I don't think there is any need for activism.					
I don't want to have responsibilities.					
I'm just not interested.					
It's not my responsibility to make things better.					
My parent/s would not be happy.					
My partner would not be happy.					
I'm afraid that it would make me look 'uncool'.					
I haven't found a cause that moves me enough.					

2. Is there any other reason why you feel that you are not active?

3. Would the provision of any of the following help (please tick as necessary)?

Tick all that apply.

- having a mentorship programme
- availability of more information about how I can be active (general)
- availability of more information about a specific cause/organisation
- provision of information that is easily accessible - e.g. through a seminar, the Faculty etc.
- provision of opportunities to mix with other youths - e.g. social activities not related to the activism
- having leadership opportunities
- provision of a travel allowance
- providing transportation or facilitating ride sharing
- provision of childcare services
- if the activism opportunity had the possibility of an exchange programme in another country
- the provision of non-monetary compensation, e.g. a study credit, obtaining activity passes, certificate, etc.
- Other:

4. If you had to be involved in a cause or be active on an issue, what would it be?

Appendix B – Salient Findings

Table A.1 Salient Findings

Prevalence of Activism
The majority of participants are not involved ($n = 168, 57.7\%$), whereas the rest of the respondents claimed that they are active ($n = 123, 42.3\%$) (Figure 4.1).
A statistically significant difference was found between activism and age group; gender; post-secondary education; attendance; and type of employment ($p < 0.05$) (Table 4.1).
Based on socio-demographic factors, 18 – 25 year olds, women, those who attended a church institution for post-secondary education, and those who were enrolled at UM on a full-time basis, or worked on a part-time basis were more likely to be active (Table 4.2).
Causes Engaged in Through Activism
Participants were mostly engaged in a social cause ($n = 82, 28.2\%$), followed by a commitment towards the environment and/or animal rights ($n = 64, 22\%$) (Figure 4.2). Almost a fifth of respondents were active in more than three causes ($n = 28, 17.9\%$) (Figure 4.8).
Young people were more likely to be active in educational activism (Figure 4.3).
Women were more likely to engage in social and environmental causes, while men who were more active in social and political activism (Figure 4.4).
Based on educational institutions, those who attended private school were involved in civic activism, those in church educational institutions were more active in educational and political causes. Social causes were prevalent amongst those who attended a governmental institution (Figure 4.5).
Those who attended UM on a full-time basis were more likely to be active in an educational cause (Figure 4.6).
Media Use for Activism
Social media ($n = 118, 40.5\%$) took precedence over any other media. Contacting politicians ($n = 40, 13.8\%$) and contacting media ($n = 32, 11\%$) attracting least responses (Figure 4.9). 13.3 % of respondents were active on more than six media (Figure 4.15).
Boycotting products stands out amongst the 36 – 45 year olds, and contacting politicians seems to be stronger amongst the older cohort (Figure 4.10). Young people were active on a variety of platforms (Table 4.4).
There is clear discrepancy for use of social media, being part of an organisation, and use of other platforms amongst those who attended a government institution for their post-secondary education (Figure 4.12). Being active on three to five media was more prevalent amongst those who attended a Church Institution ($n = 25, 69.4\%$) (Table 4.4).
Activities Engaged in
The use of social media to raise awareness and react stands out as the strongest activity through which respondents claim to be involved in civic participation (figure 4.16). Over 40% of respondents engaged in 3 – 5 roles (Figure 4.22).
Those aged between 26 – 35 years old are more likely to react to content, instead of raising awareness on social media. Youth are more likely to donate money (Figure 4.17), and more likely to engage in more than three activities (Table 4.5).

Table A.1 Salient Findings – (Continues from page 81)

Women are more likely than men to engage through lifestyle activism, donating money and raising funds (Figure 4.18). Men were less likely to engage in a diversity of activities (Table 4.5).
Lifestyle activism takes over social media participation amongst students who attended a private school for their post-secondary education. Engaging in demonstrations and/or protests seem to be more common practice by those who attended a Religious Institution for their post-secondary education (Figure 4.19).
Those working on a part-time basis are more likely to be active in 3 – 5 activities (Table 4.5), with giving donations and engaging in organisations, while they are less likely than those who are employed on a full-time basis to adopt lifestyle activism (Figure 4.20, 4.21).
Time Committed to Activism
A quarter of participants were active more than once a month (n = 75, 25.8%). A fifth of respondents claimed that they were more active during particular periods (n = 59, 20.1%) (Figure 4.23), increasing to 30.2% when asked for the hours dedicated for activism per month (Figure 4.25).
Those who were engaged in a church institution for their post-secondary education were likely to be dedicated to activism more frequently than other cohorts (Figure 4.24). Those who had attended an independent school for their post-secondary education answered that the minimum hours that they dedicate to activism was of 4 – 5 hours (Figure 4.26).
Factors that influence Activism amongst UM students
The strongest motives (Figure 4.27) included intrinsic motivational factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling strongly about the cause (n = 111, 76%); • being frustrated with injustice or inequalities (n = 110, 75.9%); • feeling that things need to change (n = 102, 70.8%); and/or • to make the world a better place (n = 99, 67.8%).
Extrinsic motivational factors such as personal development, team work and contributing their skills to the cause were also given a positive response (Figure 4.27).
The greatest barriers (Figure 4.28) to engage in civic participation were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature of partisan politics (n = 202, 75.4%); • Having enough on their plate due to their studies (n = 141, 53.8%); • Other commitments or hobbies (n = 134, 51.3%); • Fear of negative consequences if they spoke out (n = 129, 48.7%); and • Work commitments (n = 105, 39.8%).
The strongest measures to encourage activism (Table 4.6), included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having more information on how to be active (n = 140; 48.1%); • Having more information on a cause / organisation (n = 120; 41.2%); • More accessible information (n = 88; 30.5%); and • Non-monetary compensation (n = 82; 28.2%).

Appendix C – Recommendations by Theme

Table A.2 Recommendations by Theme

General
1. Research: A national study representative of the youth population that will allow for further insights on modern youth activism amongst all young people.
2. Research: A study aimed at exploring local, national or international social innovations implemented with the scope of addressing barriers to youth participation.
3. Research: A longitudinal study on the impact of a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on active engagement amongst children and young people.
4. Research: A foresight exercise on how activism will look like in the future.
5. Policy: A public campaign to entice activism targeted towards different social groups based on the emerging findings of this study.
6. Policy: Provide opportunities for structured dialogue and debates that encourage participation and networking.
7. Policy: Establish funding support programmes for young people to submit project proposals to address societal challenges.
8. Policy: Organize an activism fair to promote networking, collaboration and opportunities to learn about activism and become more active.
Age
1. Research: A longitudinal study to identify development of engagement through adulthood.
2. Policy: Create space for intergenerational dialogue between pioneers in activism and those aspiring to become active.
Gender & Marginalized youth
1. Research: Further research to understand the nature and extent of activism amongst marginalized youth.
2. Policy: Encourage participation of marginalized youth through targeted programmes.
3. Policy: Ensure that all programmes and policy measures undertaken cater for diverse realities and needs amongst youth.
Family
1. Research: Exploring attitudes and behaviours within the family to further understand the family's role in encouraging participation.
2. Policy: A national awareness raising campaign targeting parents on the benefits of activism on the development of young people.
Education
1. Research: An exploratory study to better understand what factors influence the gap in civic knowledge and activism between diverse educational institutions.

Table A.2 Recommendations by Theme – (Continues from page 83)

2. Research: Identify and examine civic and citizenship educational programmes or opportunities in Malta.
3. Policy: Lobby for further investment in civic and citizenship educational curricula in government educational institutes.
4. Policy: Establish an early intervention programme to heighten awareness of the positives of engagement and availability of diverse forms of activism.
5. Policy: Integrate active participative behaviour through teaching of skills and practices, by encouraging students to be more active in the classroom.
6. Policy: Mainstream mandatory civic education focusing on societal, political and civic history, challenges and opportunities for engagement throughout secondary and post-secondary schooling.
7. Policy: Consider setting up ‘participation spaces’ where young people can come together in a semi-structured forum and forward outcomes to the appropriate authorities.
Tertiary Education
1. Research: A comparative study focusing on students attending other tertiary level educational institutions beyond University of Malta.
2. Policy: Mainstream education on societal, political and civic challenges amongst different courses at the University of Malta.
3. Policy: Provide non-monetary rewards throughout post-secondary and tertiary education, such as extra credits or compensating for lost credits.
4. Policy: Establish a “Share Your Ideas” programme for tertiary level students to present ideas generated through their studies to policy-makers.
Social Media
1. Research: Understanding the impact of social media use on youth’s outlook towards participation.
2. Research: A better understanding of the impact of social media activism on decision-making bodies.
3. Research: An exploratory study on how digital platforms can be better used to encourage youth activism.
4. Policy: Make better use of social media to raise awareness and enhance knowledge about societal challenges and opportunities for engagement.
5. Policy: Promote social media as a tool for meaningful activism, including the promotion of digital literacy.
6. Policy: Address hate speech as a barrier to online activism, through awareness raising.
7. Policy: Create digital opportunities for meaningful engagement through an open innovation platform.

Non-governmental Organisations / Political Parties
1. Policy: Ensure that young people interested in engaging in a political party are exposed to mandatory unbiased civic educational programme.
2. Policy: Educate civic and political organisations on how to truly create youth engagement and carry out youth-focused outreach.
Formal Institutions
1. Research: An exploratory study intended to better understand the impact of partisanship and political discourse as barriers towards youth participation.
2. Policy: Establish a medium to monitor progress of ideas presented by young people which have been taken on board by policy-makers.
3. Policy: Mainstream youth involvement in different levels of decision-making through the appointment of a diverse group of young people on different committees and boards.
4. Policy: Better structure the role of youth representatives in Local Councils, through the creation of a non-partisan mentoring programme focusing on community leadership.
5. Policy: Involve Local Councils in encouraging youth activities and youth groups.
6. Policy: Shift discourse from focusing on lack of participation and to highlighting the need of making participation more accessible.



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