Navigating the Moral World:
Contrasting Adolescents' Moral Dilemmas in Social Media and Reallife Environments

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Abstract: This qualitative study aims to explore and compare adolescents' moral dilemmas in real life and on social media, focusing on their content, conflict and context. A purposive sampling method was used, involving 130 Slovenian adolescents (mean age 17.3 years). A deductive and inductive approach was used for data analysis. Results show commonalities in moral dilemmas regarding context, mainly involving friends, and content, mainly rooted in the care/harm foundation. Notable differences in conflicts were observed, largely influenced by the unique characteristics of social media. These findings contribute to the relatively unexplored realm of moral dilemmas on social media from adolescents' perspectives, providing valuable insights for moral education in the context of social media.

Keywords: Morality; dilemmas; adolescence; social media; qualitative methods.

I. Introduction

Questions about morality have preoccupied scientists for centuries[1]. In recent years a lot of work has been done on topics such as moral behaviour, reasoning, identity and emotions across different age groups, contexts and cultures (for review see Ellemers et al. 2019). However, little attention has been put to the question of morality in the context of social media from users' perspective. The objective of this article is to analyze and compare real life and social media moral dilemmas among adolescents. According to Nesi and colleagues (Nessi et al. 2018), adolescents' peer relationships differ significantly in the context of social media, and we hypothesized that social media moral dilemmas, would also differ in some respects from real life moral dilemmas, especially due to fact the most daily moral dilemmas evolved around friends.

II. Adolescence: Peer Pressure and the Beginning of Moral Character Formation

Adolescence as a developmental phase is marked by crucial strides towards identity formation (Erikson 1968). Moral development is also an important aspect of this phase, as adult moral character shapes during adolescence (Hart & Carlo 2005). In essence, moral development denotes the gradual internalisation of socially accepted norms of correct conduct, as defined by the society in which one resides. The capacity to adopt a different point of view is pivotal in the enhancement of moral judgement (Marjanovič Umek & Zupančič 2009). Considering a different perspective is associated with the progression of both social and cognitive skills, requiring logical reasoning as well as social interactions with both adults and peers, both of which increase during adolescence.

During adolescence, peers become increasingly important in determining adolescents' self-worth (Parker 2006). Peer pressure, social comparison, and the need to be part of social groups all play a significant role in shaping adolescents' daily lives. Additionally, peers exert an important influence on the development of moral character and behaviour. Adolescents who have typically acquired the capability to adopt different perspectives and engage in frequent discussions with their parents regarding ethical predicaments and concerns, as well as encountering varying viewpoints, attain a heightened degree of moral judgement (Boyes & Allen, 1993). Caravita and colleagues (Caravita et al. 2014) found that during adolescence, friends' influence plays a role in the inclination to disengage morally, as early adolescents tend to adopt their friends' level of moral disengagement. However, Beier's (Baier 2017) research suggests that peers' effect on moral behaviour is most prominent among adolescents with weaker personal moral principles. Adolescents with weak personal moral rules against drinking are very receptive to the environment and the peer group, resulting in a very high likelihood of drinking.

During adolescence, adolescents develop clearer ideas about themselves, their own identity, values and goals, and try to reconcile these with peer pressure on the one hand and parental expectations on the other (Persike & Seiffge-Krenke 2016). Through exposure to diverse social viewpoints, their growing moral development leads to questioning what is deemed right and wrong, prompting the need to resolve their own moral dilemmas.

III. The Role of Social Media in Shaping Peer Relationships

Social media plays an important role in shaping how today's adolescents view themselves, society, and their social relationships. According to Nau and colleagues, "Social media are web-based and mobile services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with content" (Nau et al. 2022, 15).

With the emphasize on the social aspect, social media represent a very appealing context for adolescents, as social life – peer relationships – is one the most important part of adolescence (Pozzoli & Gini 2012). Unique characteristics of social media (asynchronicity, premanence, publicness, availability, cue absence, quantifiability, visualness) create a specific and different context, that transform adolescents' peer experience (Nesi et al. 2018a). Nesi and colleagues (Nesi et al. 2018b) developed a theoretical framework for understanding transformation of adolescents' peer relationships on social media according to five aspects: change in frequency or immediacy of experiences (e.g., increased social comparison), amplifying experiences and demands (e.g., amplified desired for peer status), altering the qualitative nature of interactions (e.g., pressure to maintain status) facilitating new opportunities for compensatory behaviour, and creating entirely novel behaviours (e.g., new risky online behaviour). As real-life moral dilemmas mostly evolved around friends, we believe – leaning on Nesi and colleagues (Nesi et al. 2018a) framework – that moral dilemmas on social media will also be in some aspects different than those in real-life context.

IV. Immoral Behaviour on Social Media

Online anonymity, invisibility, and asynchrony are among the most prominent features of social media that can facilitate immoral behaviour. Users are disembodied and can be as anonymous as they want, resulting in less constraint to behave ethically (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel 2011). A study of Chinese 1,103 students (mean age 15.3 years) revealed that anonymity operated through moral disengagement, which then predicted cyberbullying and that asynchrony directly fostered cyberbullying (Wang & Ngai 2020). According to Crockett's (Crockett 2017) reanalysis of the data used by Hoffman and colleagues (Hoffman et al. 2014), people are more likely to learn about immoral acts online than in person or via traditional media forms (print, television). Social media research has typically focused on cyberbullying, which has become increasingly prevalent among adolescents in recent years (Zhu et al. 2021). Nocentini and colleagues (Nocentini et al. 2010) classified cyberbullying as written-verbal and visual attacks, representation (using or stealing someone else's identity to reveal personal information) and deliberate exclusion of a member from an online group. As all the aforementioned behaviours are immoral, we note that adolescents are exposed to a wider range of actions that are considered morally wrong, such as influencers exploiting their followers to earn money, spreading fake news, posting unrealistic/unauthentic photos, etc., mostly actions aimed at a wider or invisible audience (Boyd 2007).

V. Moral Dilemmas

A moral dilemma arises when a person is immersed in a situation in which his or her basic moral intuitions, values and rights conflict with each other. The person has a sense that any choice he or she makes will be wrong (Strahovnik 2008). Kohlberg (1969) constructed his moral development theory primarily through the analysis of participant responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas. His theory has been criticised for lacking ecological validity (Baumrind 1987; Haan 1975). Consequently, researchers sought to investigate what individuals perceive as moral dilemma in real-life situations.

Most of the research into adolescent-reported moral dilemmas was conducted in the last century. Yussen (1976) was among the earliest researchers to suggest that individuals' spontaneously formulated moral dilemmas may differ from those encountered in Kohlberg's studies. Yussen substantiated his claim in a study that examined the freely formulated moral dilemmas of adolescents. Adolescents frequently encountered dilemmas regarding interpersonal relationships, physical safety, and sexual relationships, while formulating moral dilemmas that primarily concerned their friends (Yussen 1976). Tirri (Tirri 1996) conducted a study with adolescents (aged 12 and 13) and reported similar themes (peer relationships, alcohol and smoking, family and divorce, drug use, self-concept conflicts, animal rights, theft, life and death, and bullying). Skoe and Gooden's (Skoe & Gooden 1996) study on adolescents revealed six overarching moral themes in dilemmas: obedience, loyalty, harming others, maintaining friendships, problem avoidance, and leisure activities. While analysing moral dilemmas, most researchers have focused solely on the primary conflict in dilemma. However, according to Johnston and colleagues (Johnston et al. 1990), it is crucial to consider the context (every conflict is embedded in some kind of relationship, e.g., with peers, parents, authorities) and the content (what is most at stake for an individual in dilemma). Assume that the conflict in a dilemma is whether to drink alcohol or not. If the dilemma pertains to friends, then the content is (not) proving loyalty to friends; but if the dilemma pertains to parents, then the content of the same conflict is (not) upholding parental beliefs and norms.

In this study, Moral Foundations Theory (MFT; Haidt 2012) is used to analyse the content of moral dilemmas. The theory describes the complexity of human morality along five main dimensions/foundations: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/ betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation. Care/harm and fairness/cheating encompass moral behaviour that attributes a higher value to the rights of the individual, while the other three attribute a higher value to the rights of the group (Graham et al. 2013). Haidt (Haidt 2008) so extended morality to the group level, arguing that morality is not only about how we behave towards each other, as commonly defined in western thought, but also about group cohesion, support for basic institutions and living a holy and noble life. MFT a descriptive theory of human moral behaviour and reasoning, emphasising the dominant role of our intuitions in the process of forming moral

judgement. The theory has been applied in various research fields, e.g., examining the relationship between endorsements of moral foundation and pollical orientation (Haidt et al. 2009) or in the context of media research (Tamborini 2011; Hopp et al. 2021). One can also find examples of studies that used MFT on adolescents (Cingel & Krcmar 2020; Stastna 2021; Sağel 2015, Güner 2020). To the best of our knowledge, the MFT has not yet been used to analyse the content of moral dilemmas. Since the theory posits moral foundations as the bases on which our morality is built, we find it suitable for analysing the content aspect of the moral dilemma, since the content represents the underlying notions of the moral dilemma.

VI. Research Question and Aims of the Study

The main research objective of the present study is to identify the similarities and differences between moral dilemmas encountered in real life situations and those on social media, with regards to their context, conflict, and content. The significance of social media as a unique developmental context for today's adolescents should not be overlooked when researching the important topic of adolescents' moral perceptions. Understanding moral issues in adolescence is a crucial component of understanding all other morally related constructs.

Moral dilemmas in real life have not been thoroughly explored from all three perspectives, as researchers tend to concentrate on only one or two aspects of moral dilemmas. Our study thus presents an opportunity to attain a more profound comprehension of the moral dilemmas encountered by present-day adolescents. To the best of the author's knowledge, moral dilemmas among adolescents on social media have not yet been researched and we identified this as an important research gap in understanding daily experiences of adolescents on social media.

VII. Method and Procedure

VII.1. Sample

The study involved 130 high school students, most of whom were female (76.9%). Six participants did not want to indicate their gender and chose the option "I do not want to answer." Five participants chose the option "Other." The participants' average age was 17.3 years ($SD = 1.3$, $min = 16$, $max = 23$). The age distribution was as follows: 16 (33.1%), 17 (31.5%), 18 (18.5%), 19 (15.4%) and 23 (1.5%). The majority of participants were attending the third year of secondary school (36.2%), followed by those in the second year (33.1%), 19.2% of the participants were in the final, fourth year whereas the remaining 11.5% were enrolled in the first year at the time of the study.

The purposive sampling method was used. The aim was to include as many

adolescents as possible attending different high schools in Slovenia to avoid a biased sample. An invitation to participate in the study was sent to various high schools in different parts of Slovenia. The invitation was also sent to the teachers in charge of students in student dorms, who then passed the invitation on to dorm residents.

VII.2. Instruments

The adolescents were first presented with an example of real-life moral dilemma. Following this, a brief explanation of what defines a moral dilemma was provided. Adolescents were then instructed to reflect on and write down a recent moral dilemma they had encountered. They were prompted to describing the situation with attention to their thought and emotions when faced with moral dilemma. The same instructions were applied to moral dilemma encountered on social media.

VII.3. Procedure

The high school students received an invitation to participate in the study from their teachers, who were usually psychology teachers. Students first read all the necessary information about the study's purpose and provided their informed consent to participate. Thereafter, they answered basic demographic questions before being asked to write down their own example of a real-life moral dilemma and a social media moral dilemma. At the end, they could leave their personal contact details to be sent two cinema tickets as a reward for participating.

VIII. Data Analysis

A deductive and an inductive approach (Bingham & Witkowsky 2022) were combined for coding the data. The content of the moral dilemmas was coded using the definitions of the five moral foundations. The first coder familiarised himself with the theory and definitions of the moral foundations and then coded the dilemmas according to which moral foundations were represented in them. Each dilemma could represent one foundation (e.g., doing harm on not) or more than one foundation (e.g., doing harm or cheating). The coder then inductively coded the context and conflict of each of the dilemma. The context has been coded according to the actor in the moral dilemma, i.e., it represents information about to whom the moral dilemma refers (e.g., friend, parents etc.). Conflict represents a concrete problem within a moral dilemma. As the conflicts were very concrete and consequently very specific, the principal researcher has grouped the conflicts into overarching themes according to their thematic similarity.

Intercoder reliability was calculated. A second coder assessed 20% of randomly selected real life and social media moral dilemmas, as 10–25% of the data is normally coded (O'Connor & Joffe 2020). A Krippendorff's alpha, as offering more flexibility (Lombard et al. 2020) was calculated to assess the degree of agreement between two

coders. According to Cicchetti and Sparrow (1981), values above 0.7 indicate a good level of agreement between coders. Data were analysed using R (R Core Team 2021).

IX. Results

IX.1. Social Media Use and Time Spent on Use

Almost all participants used Instagram, and more than half also used YouTube, Snapchat and TikTok (Table 1). The median duration of social media use on a workday was 2 hours 30 minutes, while the median on a weekend day was 3 hours 30 minutes.

Social media	N and % of use
Instagram	121(93.1%)
YouTube	105(80.8%)
Snapchat	95(73.1%)
TikTok	74(56.9%)
Facebook	46(35.4%)
BeReal	57(43.8%)
Discord	35(26.9%)
Twitter	9(6.9%)
Twitch	7(5.4%)
Other	7(5.4%)

Table 1: Use of social media.

IX.2. Intercoder Reliability

The Kappa coefficients for real life moral dilemmas were 0.93 (context), 0.85 (conflicts), 0.78 (content) and regarding social media: 0.92 (context), 0.85 (conflicts) and 0.74 (content). These values indicate a good level of inter-rater agreement.

IX.3. Absence or Inadequacy of Moral Dilemmas

Ten participants indicated they had not lately faced a real-life moral dilemma. For example: "Oh, I do not remember facing a moral dilemma recently." Yet, 30 participants reported a situation that cannot really be described as a dilemma. They either commented on the example given (e.g., "I do not think she did the right thing because she could have found a scholarship the old-fashioned way.") or they described a situation that did not reflect any kind of moral dilemma. For instance, "Should I ask a girl out on a date or not?" Thirty-two participants expressed that they had no moral dilemmas on social media. Twenty-nine participants wrote about situations that could not be classified as a moral dilemma on social media. For example, "My friend bought LIKEs so she could talk about

how many LIKEs she had," since this is merely a situation the participant found to be wrong.

IX.4. Context of Moral Dilemmas

As shown in Figure 1, most real-life moral dilemmas among adolescents occur in the context of friends (77.8%), with the same being the case for moral dilemmas on social media (63.8%). The following is an example of a real-life moral dilemma that arised in the context of friends: "A friend recently asked me to help her write a report /.../ It soon became clear to me that my 'help' really meant that I would write the report for her, or at least largely without her help. This did not feel right /.../. It was not difficult for me to help, but I did not want to do her work for her. I felt bad anyway, because I knew that it would be difficult for her to do it /.../" The second-most common context for real life moral dilemmas is classmates, whereas the second-most common context for social media moral dilemmas is self and people as human beings (other people in general). The percentage of moral dilemmas on social media involving classmates is much lower than with real life moral dilemmas. No moral dilemma on social media involved authority figures like parents or teachers, while in real life 15.6% of the dilemmas involved an authority figure (e.g., "Recently, my younger sister took the phone from my dad because she needed it for school. /.../ she saw my father talking to another woman who is not my mother on the phone. /.../ It is more than obvious that my father is cheating on my mother. I am in a terrible dilemma because I honestly don't know what and how. I feel bad for my mother's ignorance, but on the other hand, somehow neither I nor my sister should know this information, because she shouldn't have been talking on the phone. I don't know whether I should tell my mother or not, because if I tell her I will be the one who will take all the blame for invading my father's privacy /.../). Only 11.1% of real-life moral dilemmas referred to the context of people in general or an unknown person/ stranger, compared to 33.3% on social media. As might be expected, no real-life moral dilemmas included famous people or influencers, although on social media 15.9% of the moral dilemmas entailed this context. The context of a family member or (ex)partners is low in both moral dilemma types (1.4%–5.6%).
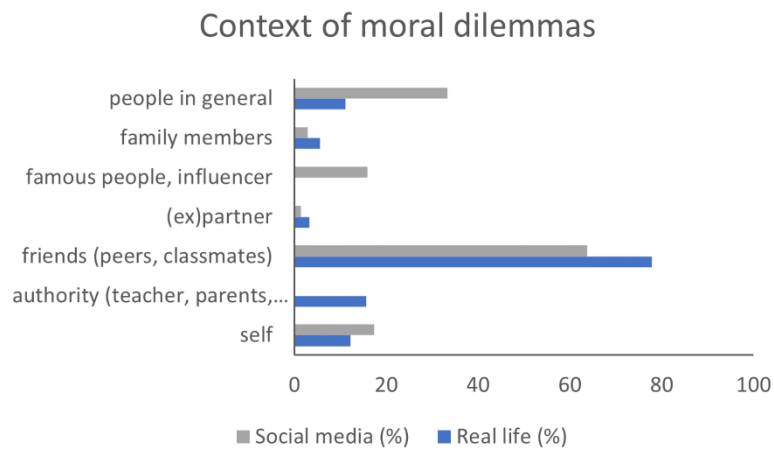
Context of moral dilemmas

Figure 1: Context of the real life and social media moral dilemmas.

IX.5. Conflicts of Moral Dilemmas

Table 2 presents the classification of conflicts appearing in the real-life moral dilemmas. Most conflicts concerned (un)fairness and a potential reaction to it. For example: "What to do when your classmates cheat during a test. I know it's wrong, but I never condemn them because it's their business and it's bad for them not to learn." The second-biggest topic are conflicts around being sincere or lying. For example, one of the study participants confessed: "I was invited to my classmate's birthday party. My best friend was not invited to the party. This made me hesitant whether to tell her about the invitation and whether to attend the party. /.../". The third category referred to a conflict over whether to help friends or not. One example: "A friend of mine, who refused to drink alcohol until she was 18 because of her religion. /…/ However, at the beginning of this school year she started to drink alcohol every week, which is 'normal' for teenagers. I had the unpleasant feeling that she was drinking alcohol to get attention from boys and to fit in more easily, even though she was not supposed to drink until she was 18 because of her religion. I don't know what to think about the situation, whether to talk to her or leave her alone". Other categories of conflicts not so often present in the dilemmas are listed in Table 2.

CONFLICTS	N
UN(FAIRNESS)	18
(un)fair evaluation	4
(un)fairness in school work	10
(un)fairness in achievement	2
(un)fairness in the attainment of student benefits	1
(un)fairness in obtaining a job	1
(un)fairness in obtaining financial aid	1
LYING/SINCERITY	12

lying	3
fabrication of survey responses	2
unexcused absenteeism	1
breach of confidentiality	2
(dis)honesty with friends	3
unfriendliness/sincerity towards a partner	1
(NOT) HELPING FRIENDS	10
jealousy/support regarding a friend's success	1
counselling, helping, pointing out inappropriate behaviour/respecting a friend's choices	5
(un)help to friends	4
(NOT) RESPONDING TO AN INAPPROPRIATE ACT	9
(not) responding to harassment	1
(not) taking revenge	1
(not) intervening in a negative act	4
(not) intervening in an inappropriate relationship	1
(not) reporting a rape	2
(NOT) GIVING SOMETHING	8
(not) sharing notes	4
(not) lending money	1
(not) giving money to a stranger	3
CHOOSING BETWEEN DIFFERENT LOVED ONES	7
choosing between different friends / joining different societies	4
choosing between relatives or friends	3
(NOT) TELLING ABOUT CHEATING	6
(not) telling a person that their partner is cheating	5
(not) telling one's partner about having romantic feelings towards another person	1
COMMITMENTS/LEISURE TIME	5
balancing different commitments	4
burnout – seeking help	1
(MIS)ALIENATION OF OTHER PEOPLE'S PROPERTY	3
(NOT) BEING WITH SOMEONE WHO IS IN A RELATIONSHIP	3
(not) expressing feelings for the person in the relationship	2
(not) being with the ex-girlfriend of a friend	1
(NOT) SUPPORTING SOCIAL ISSUES/PROBLEMS	3
(not) promoting LGBT people in the media	1
(not) buying ethically controversial products	2
(NOT) HANGING OUT	2

(not) keeping in touch with a friend	1
(not) hanging out with a classmate	1

Table 2: Conflicts in the real-life moral dilemmas.

Table 3 provides an overview of the conflicts embedded in the moral dilemmas on social media. The two most common categories of conflicts are whether to be honest with a friend about their content and actions on social media and whether to respond to inappropriate, immoral content. An example of the former conflict is the following dilemma: "My friend shared some very 'crass' stuff on Instagram because she wanted to look cool. I was embarrassed to look at it, but I was not sure if I should tell her to stop..." An example of the second conflict is: "I face cyberbullying very often. A dilemma arises for me when I do not know whether I should respond to hate messages and thereby contribute to the level of online harassment or stick to my moral principles and avoid any conflict." The third-most frequently expressed conflicts in the dilemmas related to whether to share content that is wrong, such as posting a photo of oneself where one does not look like that in real life. Another example could be, "Friends of a friend posted a funny meme of a teacher; it was very funny, but I still liked the post even though it might have been inappropriate." Nine of the adolescents' conflicts involved how they should have reacted to inappropriate actions and content from their friends, followed by a conflict over (dis)liking certain posts. Other conflict topics mentioned less frequently can be found in Table 3.

CONFLICTS IN THE MORAL DILEMMAS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	N
(DIS)HONESTY WITH FRIENDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	14
(not) telling a friend about a fake profile created by other friends	2
(not) telling a friend the truth about messages	3
(not) standing by a friend	2
(not) telling friends your true opinion about their posts	4
(not) telling friends about mocking content about them	3
(NOT) RESPONDING TO INAPPROPRIATE ACTS AND CONTENT	12
(not) responding to false information	1
(not) responding to hate speech	2
(in)appropriateness of hate speech about perpetrators of violent acts	1
(not) responding to online violence	3
(not) responding to online group violence (group resentment)	2
(in)appropriateness of posting photos of children	3

(NOT) SHARING INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT	10
sharing others' content without their permission	3
(not) posting unrealistic photos	3
(not) sharing a funny yet offensive post	3
(not) sharing a violent video, the victim can be seen but the perpetrator can be traced	1
(NOT) RESPONDING TO INAPPROPRIATE ACTIONS BY FRIENDS	10
(un)persuading inappropriate posts by friends about other friends	1
(un)blocking friends for inappropriate posts	1
(not) alerting friends to inappropriate content	4
(not) pointing out to a friend that it is not okay for them to engage in online violence	2
(not) confronting a friend about being misleading to their followers	2
(UN)LIKING/FOLLOWING POSTS	9
(un)liking/following/blocking a profile	5
(un)liking/following a post	4
(DIS)TRUSTING CONTENT ON SOCIAL NETWORKS	4
(dis)trusting allegations about a known person	1
(dis)trusting posts	1
(non)participation in sweepstakes	1
(dis)trusting advertisements from charitable foundations	1
(DIS)SUPPORT SOCIAL ISSUES	4
euthanasia	2
abortion	1
#metoo movement	1
OTHER	4
(not) allowing artificial intelligence to create art	1
(un)necessary use of social networks	1
(ir)responsible use of social networks	1
(un)ignoring friends due to other commitments	2

Table 3: Conflicts in the moral dilemmas on social media.

IX.6. Content of Moral Dilemmas

The dilemmas were analysed according to which moral foundations they contained (see Figure 2). In both moral dilemma types, the order in which the foundations occur have the same pattern. Care/harm and fairness/cheating are the foundations that occurred most frequently in both the real life and social media moral dilemmas. An example of moral dilemmas in real life representing care/harm foundations is "My best friend was

diagnosed with anorexia a couple of months ago. /.../. I tried to stand by her side and we meet several times where she told me about her distress. I have not had much free time for the last two months because of my final year, and I have some problems of my own to deal with. We haven't seen each other for two months (only talking occasionally by text) /.../. I still don't know if my decisions were right. Should I have made more time for her despite my problems, or is facing my own problems a good enough reason to need a little distance?" An example of fairness/cheating moral foundations on social media is the following dilemma: "I face a moral dilemma every time I see advertisements for various foundations that help socially deprived groups /.../ even though I could help a fellow human being in some way, this kind of investment seems too risky to me, as there are so many false advertisements and scammers on the market today." The foundation of loyalty/betrayal was the third-most common in each type of moral dilemma, followed by sanctity/degradation and authority/subversion. Still, we observe that sanctity/ degradation was much more present in the social media moral dilemmas than in real life and that authority/subversion did not feature in the moral dilemmas on social media.
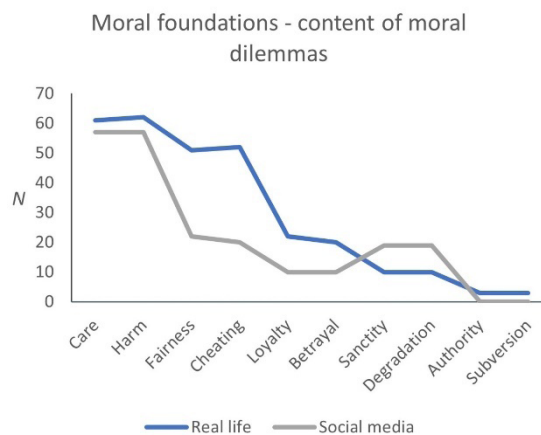

Figure 2: Occurrence of moral foundations in each type of moral dilemma.

Figure 3 provides a summary of the similarities and differences between the two types of moral dilemmas. The most typical real-life dilemma among adolescents is the one representing the care/harm foundation appearing in the context of friends and including a conflict over lying or being sincere. The most typical dilemma on social media is again the dilemma presenting the care/harm foundation, occurring in the context of friends, and revolving around the conflict of being honest (or not) with friends. Adolescents' moral dilemmas in both types of dilemmas mostly arise in the context of friendships and reflect content either within or between the moral foundations of care and fairness. However, the moral conflicts in both dilemmas show considerable differences. Differences could be attributed to specific characteristics of social media and their impact on specific interpersonal relationships.
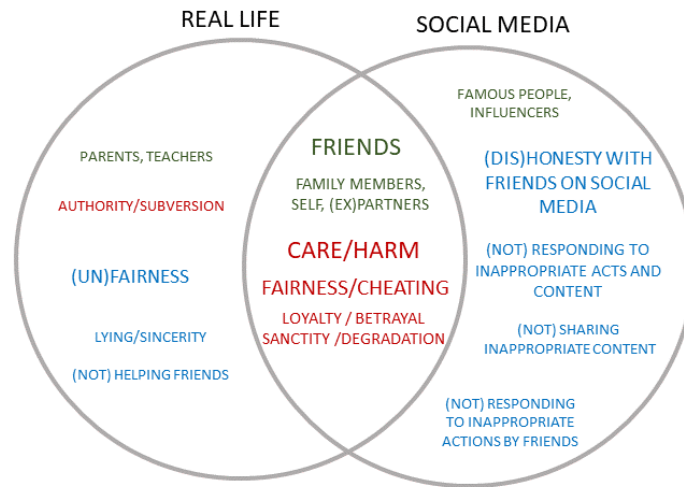
Figure 3: Summary of the results.

X. Discussion

In recent times, several ethical and moral considerations regarding social media, such as user manipulation and the spreading of fake news, were raised. However, insufficient attention has been given to the perception of users, particularly adolescents, on (im)moral acts on social media. Most research has focused on specific immoral behaviours, such as cyberbullying or fake news (Van Osch & Coursaris 2015), but this paper contends that morality and moral issues on social media are a wider construct that merits exploration. The findings of the analysis show both common traits and substantive differences between the two types of moral dilemmas.

X.1. Similarities

The great majority of the moral dilemmas revolved around friends, namely, in real life and on social media. This comes as no surprise, as a crucial part of adolescence is forging strong bonds with peers and becoming independent from parents (Zupančič & Svetina 2009). Peers, with their considerable influence, including on moral reasoning, play a pivotal role in this developmental stage (Zupančič & Svetina 2009). Our findings align with prior research on moral dilemmas, such as Yussen (Yussen 1976) and Johston and colleagues (Johnston et al. 1990).

Regarding the content of the moral dilemmas, the foundation care/harm and fairness/cheating prevailed in both types of dilemmas. This aligns with multiple studies (Vauclair et al. 2014; Saucier et al. 2015; Graham et al. 2011) which have demonstrated that when making moral judgments, individuals from Western cultures tend to prioritize the foundations of care/harm and fairness/cheating over those from Eastern cultures. Research on adolescents using moral foundations theory indicates that young people

attribute a higher level of significance to the individualising foundations, namely care and fairness, compared to binding foundations (De Angelis et al. 2023; Güner 2020). The third most frequently observed moral foundation was loyalty/betrayal in both types of dilemmas. In her investigation of age disparities in moral foundations, Sağel (Sağel 2015) discovered that binding foundations were more prevalent among adolescents than emerging adults. Adolescents may view behaviours such as lying to protect their peer group, which ultimately fosters in-group loyalty, as morally justified (Sağel 2015).

X.2. Differences

The characteristics of social media that influence online peer relationships, as defined by Nesi and colleagues (Nesi et al. 2018) were reflected in conflicts of moral dilemmas that adolescents encounter on social media and were not evident in real-life moral dilemmas. For instance, a dilemma arose due to the availability on social media, as adolescents faced a decision between responding to late-night text messages from a friend in need or prioritising a few hours of rest. This issue was exacerbated by the swift nature in which adolescents can share and respond to content on social media. The concept of visualness (Perloff 2014) is apparent in the dilemmas about telling a friend that their photo is too sexual and therefore inappropriate, or simply respecting a friend's decision about self-representation. Additionally, quantifiability, which generates expectations of likes and comments, can promote the sharing of more sensationalized information and encourage problematic behaviours (Nesi et al. 2018). This is evident in the dilemmas surrounding the posting of unrealistic photographs purely for the purpose of gaining popularity among peers. Permanent accessibility of content shared was noticeable in situations where adolescents were sent inappropriate screenshots of their friends without their knowledge and were in dilemma of how to respond. The absence cues (disembodiment of users; see Subrahmanyam & Šmahel 2011) was also observed in situations where adolescents encountered posts of violent behaviour on social media but hesitated to respond due to uncertainty about the accuracy of the content. Adolescents' moral dilemmas on social media were largely about to respond or not when they are faced with something which is not right and not appropriate. Conflicts in real-life moral dilemmas were much more diverse than those found on social media. The most conflicts were related to issues of fairness. Specifically, in relation to schoolwork and grades, as well as situations where obtaining something in an unfair manner is an option.

In real life, there were dilemmas concerning authority figures, such as parents, teachers, or employers. However, none of the dilemmas on social media were centred around these figures. Such an outcome is unsurprising given that social media is a context, where adolescents communicate without including parents or other authority figures (Vanherle et al. 2023). Regarding moral dilemmas on social media, approximately 16% of such dilemmas refer to famous people or influencers, whereas in real life not a single dilemma represented this context, again reflecting the nature of social media.

The foundation of authority/subversion was not present in the social media moral dilemmas. This foundation refers to respect and obedience to an authority in social hierarchies (Graham et al. 2013). Social media is a context without authority figures. They function as a private microcosm of adolescents and accordingly it was to be expected that this foundation would not feature in the dilemmas. Sanctity/degradation was more present on social media than in real life, which can be explained by the fact that adolescents find much more content on social media as impure and experience more feelings of disgust and contamination underlying this foundation (Koleva et al. 2013).

XI. Implications

This study highlights the importance of thinking about one's own moral dilemmas in the context of moral development, as it has been found that adolescents who think more about moral issues and dilemmas also exhibit higher levels of moral reasoning (Boyes & Allen 1993). The study presented here investigates moral dilemmas on social media, a topic yet to receive much scholarly attention. The analysis identifies key differences between moral dilemmas experienced in real life and on social media, supporting the notion that social media constitutes a unique environment fostering distinct types of relationships and interactions (Nesi et al. 2018a), potentially affecting adolescents' perspectives on moral problems. This study enhances the theoretical framework for adolescents' perception of morality on social media and provides a basis for further research into adolescent moral behaviour on social media. We contend that (im)morality represent wider constructs that encompass not only specific behaviours such as cyberbullying or hate speech, but also other immoral actions designed to influence larger audiences. Our study provides evidence for this assertion, specifically in the form of moral dilemmas involving influencers and famous people. Another theoretical contribution is made through the application of Moral foundations theory to examine the content of moral dilemmas. This theory has demonstrated its value in comprehending the fundamental themes of dilemmas, therefore extending the range of its applicability. Analysing all three aspects of moral dilemmas (context, conflict, content) enabled us to identify differences and similarities between both types of dilemmas, which would not be possible, if we would focus only on one aspect. In addition, our findings can also be beneficial to practitioners in designing and implementing moral education programs in schools. Increased awareness of the moral dilemmas faced by adolescents could aid educators and counsellors in planning workshops to raise awareness of immoral behaviour on social media. Educators can use role-playing exercises to tackle authentic moral dilemmas, thereby fostering moral and social growth of adolescents.

XII. Limitations and Future Directions

Our study involved some limitations. The sample consisted of 130 adolescents and gender was not evenly distributed and therefore in the future a study should be conducted with the same proportions of women and men to examine potential gender differences. The second limitation concerns the way the questionnaires were administered. Some adolescents inappropriately stated one of the two dilemmas. In most cases, they wrote about a situation that they felt was unfair. For future research, we recommend giving an additional instruction with an example of an unjust situation that is not a dilemma to avoid these situations. In last years, there has been a critic about the reliability of measuring moral foundations (Tamul et al. 2020) and there has been attempts to add additional foundations (liberty/oppression) (Iyer et al. 2012; Atari et al. 2023), which should be taken into consideration.

To our knowledge, researchers have not yet given attention to moral dilemmas on social media. In the future, examining moral dilemmas in social media across different platforms would be crucial, as there may be significant differences arising from the varied social media environments. It is also imperative to investigate the moral dilemmas of different age groups in connection to their moral reasoning, moral identity and moral behaviour on social media.

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