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Chapter Six touched on this objective. Internet narratives may be experienced differently (as educational or as spiritual) by individuals, and these experiences should be reflected on critically. Internet narratives may lend themselves to simulations of lived religion, simulating abstract concepts to students. Internet narratives may showcase and perpetuate social inequalities and should be considered critically. Current events, social dilemmas and social justice may all be simulated through Internet narratives. All these simulations can benefit a religion education class and encourage a more tolerant society. Chapter Seven showcased concepts connected to religion in digital narratives; they have the potential to act as simulators in education settings. In turn, digital narrative users can benefit from religious education if narratives are utilised to become more conscious of the information that they receive through the digital world.

Chapter Eight showcased a myriad of intolerant and counter-narratives in the digital world. At the heart of many intolerant phenomena are identity-related concepts prompting us-versus-them phenomena. These identity-related factors sometimes directly relate to religion or intersect with religion. This puts religious studies in an ideal position to promote the responsible use of narratives in an educational setting. Counter-narratives can be a tool to promote tolerance and is an ideal creative tool for teaching people about religions (if the digital divide allows). These examples illustrate how religious education can benefit from digital narratives as a creative source. Furthermore, these narratives are in the world and being consumed. In an era where intolerance spreads more easily because of the digital world, digital narrative users can benefit from religious education settings incorporating digital narratives.

#### 10.1.4 The responsible and ethical use of narratives

- SQ2: What ethical constructs can help the responsible use of digital narratives?
- RG2: To encourage responsible and ethical use of the information found and passed on through the digital world.

Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six, and Eight added to this objective. Chapter Two discussed the term tolerance and touched on the concept of humanisation. One's ethics profoundly impacts how these two terms are understood. Students can broaden their understanding of the concept by using digital narratives to illustrate the different spectrums of tolerance and intolerance. When students identify tolerant and intolerant concepts, they can critically evaluate them and ensure that narratives do not negatively impact them with an ethos of intolerance. Chapter Four discussed how conspiracy theories and propaganda often contain misinformation that seeks to increase us-versus-them phenomena and fear of threat (e.g., toward one's way of life or ethical constructs). Showcasing these narratives to students in religion studies classes alongside tolerance theories that showcase that difference does not always imply threat can be beneficial. Furthermore, such narratives usually have other agendas, such as political or nationalistic agendas. It is essential to showcase these concepts to students as well. One of the essential factors to consider here is emotional responses such as negativity bias and sympathetic or empathetic responses from the audience toward a narrative. Depending on the narrative context, these responses can be positive or negative regarding the user's affective realism. Encouraging students to evaluate the emotions evoked by narratives may be a critical ethical concern for future narrative evaluations.

Chapter Five showcased that the choice of narrative medium may impact how critical narrative users are in their consumption. Different mediums may have different time demands on the user. A more extended narrative may be chosen more critically than shorter narratives. However, all narratives affect users' affective realism; students can be urged to choose their narratives critically, as the ethical choice in narratives can be significant. However, critically evaluating the information found and emotions evoked by all mediums is essential. Chapter Six pointed toward an ethical consideration that needs to be considered: economic gains may impact what narratives are created and to what end on the internet. This is also true for digital entertainment, but consumers may assume the economic gains of these narratives as they are more traditional forms of narrative mediums. Internet narrative creators have economic gains that do not always come directly from the consumer (e.g., advertising) and may not always be considered. Furthermore, there are ethical considerations that content consumers should have, for example, reporting harmful content and not sharing overtly biased and misinformed content.

Chapter Eight stated that by making students aware of different types and intents of narrative (e.g. neutral, intolerant and counter-narratives), students can view the narrative critically in the future. By teaching students how their minds work and that authority figures are not immune to affective realism, they can learn not to take narratives at face value. Narratives can prompt emotional responses that are not always fitting, needed or tolerant (e.g. fear, anger, and us-versus-them responses). This is not to say that such emotions do not have an appropriate place. Teaching students to evaluate such emotional responses can help them modulate their emotional responses in the future and create more responsible responses to narratives. Furthermore, if students are aware of patterns often found in narratives that prompt intolerant ideologies, they may see these narratives more clearly in the future (e.g. scapegoating). It can also include making students aware of counter-narratives that can benefit them throughout their lifetimes if utilised. Chapter Eight thereby showcased many of the concepts that were apparent in the previous Chapters.

Throughout the thesis, it has become apparent that narratives are more than just nonchalant stories, regardless of their medium. Narratives form part of the information received by humans. The information received through narrative has increased exponentially through the digital world as humans have more access than ever to digital narratives<sup>45</sup>. There is a duality in the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the information found in narratives. Information found in narratives may be truthful and trustworthy, leading to accessible information that people can easily learn from, positively affecting their affective realism. However, misinformation, propaganda and conspiracy theories are also found in the digital world. Not all misinformation has been broadcasted to harm. The content creator may sometimes believe the misinformation they propagate, as it forms part of their affective realism.

Some ask what is truth and whose truth is legitimate (Valaskivi & Robertson 2022:155). It is beyond the scope of the thesis to answer the question of truth and legitimacy. This question becomes even more convoluted when working with religions, as each religion's Mythology is as true as the believing community (Ngcobo & Beyers 2013:1). The aim here was not to question one religious truth as relevant to other religious truths. Instead, the thesis sought to encourage an ethical stance, where the information found in the narrative should be questioned. Students should be encouraged to practice a conscious retrospective reflection, showing curiosity about the information they receive. While a religious group may not always agree on

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<sup>45</sup> Taking the digital divide into account.

every aspect of religion, especially when religion is becoming more individualised, there are general standards to what groups believe. When narratives show obvious biases against groups, seeking to dehumanise them to create an us versus them situation, students should learn to think critically about these narratives and not just take them at face value.

#### 10.1.5 Critical thinking abilities and digital narratives

- SQ6: How can religious studies encourage people to employ critical thinking abilities in the digital world?
- RG3: To encourage critical thinking abilities when using information.
- PC5: Emphasising critical thinking abilities when engaging with the digital world.

Chapters One, Two, Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight added to this objective. Theoretical frameworks such as the one found in Chapter One (constructs, simulations, affective realism and intersectionality) can assist students in analysing the way they think about narratives, themselves and others. These terms can give them the tools to understand how the human mind works. It is therefore recommended that such theoretical frameworks form part of religious studies classes; If they are not utilised already, this will be contextually bound. By making students aware of how their minds work, their constructs, simulations, affective realism, and intersectionality, they may understand themselves and others better. Students can interpret narratives to showcase the different constructs, simulations, affective realism and intersectionality of specific phenomena in narratives. Students can also be asked to identify possible biases that can potentially come from the narrative creator's affective realism. Students can be asked to reflect on how narratives influence their understanding of the world.

Chapter Two stated that educators can encourage students' critical thinking abilities by giving them specific tasks like matching narratives with definitions or asking students to find specific phenomena within narratives. With such exercises, narratives become more than just "stories"; they become part of the information students receive daily. Chapter Four stated that narrative theories and compositions can be used to evaluate narratives critically. Narrative theories contribute to the understanding of the human mind and the impact that narrative has on it. This does not just contribute to a general understanding of the human mind; students can use these theories to understand their relationships with narratives, as individuals are not all impacted similarly. If students understand how their minds work, they can put more effort into evaluating situations that need them. Students may change as they age, and this gives them the tools to evaluate their relationship with narratives throughout their lives. Narrative composition can give students reflection points to focus on better understanding narratives. Narrative compositions can add to students' critical evaluation tools.

Chapter Five stated that care should be taken not to perpetuate misconceptions that specific narratives may be less prone to misinformation or bias, as any medium or source can have misinformation or bias embedded. Students should be encouraged to work critically with all mediums they encounter. Using diverse mediums in education settings may assist students in seeing that all narratives can have positive and negative information and should, therefore, be evaluated critically. Chapter Six stated that pointing out thematic, synthetic, and memetic concepts in all internet narrative mediums may help students view all narratives critically. The narrative creator's affective realism can impact any narrative medium. These narratives may, in turn, affect the content consumer. Furthermore, critical thinking may be encouraged through internet narratives that simulate different perspectives of one phenomenon. This may encourage students to consider concepts from multiple angles, increasing humanisation and tolerance.

Chapter Seven stated that by using narratives in education settings, educators encourage critical thinking when consuming narratives. Educators can potentially create curiosity in students that can cause lifelong learning. Furthermore, para-social interactions with narrative characters can help students broaden their understanding of the world throughout their lives. Chapter Eight stated that us-versus-them narratives often try to enforce unhealthy communal affective realism in communities. These narratives have prominent identity-related concepts that they try to sway in a manner that causes intolerance toward the other. If these narratives are enforced, a fundamentalistic affective realism arises that sees others as a threat and as meritless in their understanding of the world. Digital narratives may cause a suspension of disbelief, wherein para-social interaction is possible, causing an expansion of one's affective realism where others may be humanised. Thereby, digital narratives can be used as a simulator to assist educators in encouraging more tolerant societies by showcasing multiple viewpoints within humanity. As unhealthy communal affective realism can be realised through narratives, so too can healthy affective realism be encouraged through digital narratives. Making students aware of the effect of digital narratives on their affective realism can aid critical thinking when utilising narratives.

### 10.1.6 Tolerance and the responsible use of digital narratives

- SQ7: What means are there to promote religious tolerance in multi-religious societies in the digital world?
- RG6: To encourage tolerance in a multi-cultural society through the informed use of electronic narratives.
- PC4: Emphasising the need for responsible use of information in the digital world.

Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six, Seven, and Eight contributed to this Objective. Chapter Two stated that by encouraging students to spot tolerant and intolerant concepts within narratives, students can become more aware of the underlying messages (intentional and unintentional) spread through narratives. With this in mind, they can evaluate these underlying messages and ensure that an intolerant narrative does not negatively impact them. Chapter Four stated that different points of interest can arise between narrative and religious education to promote tolerance. One of the main concepts that can benefit students is to encourage curiosity about the phenomena they encounter in narratives. This can be toward religions or fragments of religious and (in)tolerant attitudes they encounter within narratives. Their curiosity should lead them to question whether the information received is accurate and whether there is more information on the subject. This can lead to lifelong learning where students encounter concepts throughout their lives, and rather than ignoring the phenomena or fearing it, they can expand their understanding, developing their tolerance skills. Teaching students to use the para-social interaction phenomena can lead to them interacting with a greater variety of narrative characters and learning from them. Even if this is not the case, the positive para-social interaction they experience in class can lead to better tolerance and humanisation.

Chapter Five stated that not all mediums and narratives are equal when exposing students to diversity. Some mediums, like eBooks, may not showcase diversity in a way the audience will genuinely grasp as the narrative leans on the reader's imagination (Murrar & Brauer 2017). Audio-visual narratives may assist more in this manner, yet this would also depend on casting and directorial choices in how the narrative is showcased. For example, actors may be chosen to be closer to the target audience's comfort zone. Chapter Six stated that ever-evolving technologies can impact the effectiveness of narratives. For example, news has a much bigger digital footprint than previously and will only grow as technology progresses (an example of some of the latest progress is virtual reality news). Narrative users should consider the impact of technological progress on their concepts, such as the increase or decrease in tolerance that these narratives create.

Simulations like counter-narratives and peace journalism available through internet narratives should be utilised in education settings to promote tolerance. Various perspectives on phenomena are available via internet narratives; if utilised, this may assist students in viewing phenomena from multiple angles and increase their tolerance skills. Internet narratives may showcase people from different backgrounds within their lived experiences and promote humanisation. Chapter Seven stated that by showcasing narratives with lived religious experiences, educators encourage para-social interaction that can lead to better tolerance and humanisation. Examples of such narratives can be found under *Ritual* and *Spirituality* under the *Narrative evaluation example* sections. Furthermore, encouraging students to be curious about the phenomena encountered in narratives can encourage lifelong learning, expanding constructs and tolerance in students. A narrative that showcases this can be found under *Myth and Symbol*, under the *Narrative evaluation example* section.

Chapter Eight stated that narratives that promote inclusivity, for example, nationalistic narratives that encompass all the members of a set nation, may increase tolerance. Narratives that showcase different viewpoints may create a more holistic understanding of society while promoting tolerance and humanisation. A way to counter fundamentalistic affective realism is through curiosity about concepts simulated in narratives and, thereby, concepts in the physical world. By creating curiosity and a better understanding of different simulations of constructs, others' viewpoints can be seen as less threatening and more valuable. Working critically with narratives that promote fundamentalistic ideals through seeing the memetic, synthetic and thematic concepts that the narrative tries to promote can also aid in creating tolerant multi-religious societies. The utilisation of counter-narratives is critical as it may increase the effectiveness of fact-based learning. Many examples were given under the heading *Examples from digital narratives* that showcase intolerance and counter-narratives. Furthermore, under the heading *Narrative evaluation example*, two examples of narratives that can act as counter-narratives in education settings were discussed.

### 10.1.7 Post-secularism and digital narrative

- SQ8: What role will the concept of post-secularism play within the analysis of the digital world?

Chapters One, Two, Three, Seven, and Eight contributed to this objective. One must understand religion in a modern and post-secular era to understand post-secularism. The definition of religion was given within Chapter One under the heading *Defining religion*, and post-secular aspects are embedded. Some of these aspects included the individualisation of religion, both an acknowledgement of religious and irreligious people, an acknowledgement that religion is not disappearing, and an acknowledgement that religious and irreligious affiliation affects people's affective realism and humanity at large. As this is a post-secular age, such post-secular concepts as those found in the definition must be considered when working with narrative in a religious education setting.

Chapter Two stated that different post-secular societies have different ideas regarding the simulation of tolerance, respect, humanisation, and religion. Students may understand the narratives better by considering the narrative creators' context. Narrative creators may perpetuate the ideologies in their context, or they may go against set ideologies. How and if narrative creators incorporate their contextual ideologies in narratives can be an essential topic of conversation in religious education settings. Chapter Three stated that previously, in the secular age, fields like religion and narrative were not valued as much for their academic pursuit. In the Post-secular age, where "irrational" concepts did not disappear as expected, these fields are valued more— as religion and narrative impact humanity and their affective realism (regardless of affiliation or non-affiliation). In a post-secular age, there is no global governmental consensus on where, how, and if concepts such as religion should be taught and to whom; educators still need to consider their countries' context and laws. Post-secular mindsets of multiple truths should be considered within religious education settings, as many countries are now multi-religious.

Chapter Seven stated that lived religion narratives can add a para-social interaction simulation to education settings. Lived religion narratives are memetic and should not be seen as synthetic. However, students should be cautioned that the narrative should not be seen as thematic. The narrative may showcase the lived religious experience that many may share. In a post-secular understanding, the individualisation of experiences is a factor that needs to be considered. Students should understand that the lived experience does not necessarily showcase the experience of everyone in the religious group, as this can make the phenomena stagnant. Other

experiences do not diminish the showcased experience, nor are they less authentic. Chapter Eight added that concepts not valued in the secular age are considered more valuable and worthy of study in the post-secular age. Religion, emotion and narrative were considered irrational and unworthy of pursuit. Today, the influence of these three concepts simulated together is immense in the digital age. They combine to influence how humans understand the world around them. In a post-secular age, these three concepts should not be viewed in isolation, as they intersect with many others. Care must be taken not to scapegoat concepts like religion, emotion and narrative; their impact on humanity should equally not be ignored. In a post-secular world, analysing something as complex as narratives would have to incorporate a holistic understanding of concepts and their intersections.

#### 10.1.8 Narrative quantity in daily use

- RG1: To make people conscious of the digital narrative they experience daily.
- PC1: Showing that there are vast quantities of religious content within digital narratives.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Eight contributed to this objective. Chapter Four added that the digital world has created a space where narratives are constantly available. If a less controlled environment is desirable in education settings, students can be asked to evaluate the narratives they consume daily (e.g. for a week, month or semester). This is a good assignment idea in settings where the digital divide is not very prominent. Making sure that students have access to narratives is essential for this assignment. However, as digital narratives are so numerous and varied, there is a chance that students have access to some form of digital narrative. This assignment option may help students see how much narrative they consume and how much information they receive.

Chapter Five stated that modern technology has brought different forms of digital entertainment into the average home. Previously, narratives were more challenging to access; for example, one had to go to a theatre or concert to enjoy narratives. Narratives are also more portable, as they can be taken anywhere on a digital device. Humans have an instant escape in modern digital narratives. However, this has also led to overconsumption of narratives. Critically evaluating information found within narratives is crucial for modern societies to flourish, as modern humans have a constant stream of information and misinformation through narrative. Chapter Six stated that internet narratives are highly available and can be overconsumed without any conscious retrospective reflection. Encouraging students through assignments to contemplate the time spent and content consumed through their internet narrative use may be

very important. Asking students to catalogue concepts found in internet narratives or positive and negative simulations they encountered may assist in the reflection process.

Chapter Eight stated that when major world events have thematic leanings toward religions, it can lead to storms of narratives in the digital world, starting with internet narratives, and eventually, they can also go over to digital entertainment. These narratives are not always neutral or well-intended. These storms encompass a large number of narratives. If such a storm is present within the module time, students can be asked to document the narratives connected to the world events that cross their path. They can be asked to analyse and classify the narratives. This may make students more aware of such phenomena and the amount of narratives that they receive in this regard. When giving students such assignments, the digital divide and individual narrative consumption should be considered.

#### 10.1.9 Implications for religious education and curriculum development

- SQ11: What broad principles can educators follow when working with digital narratives and curricula.
- RG9: To help identify digital narratives' implications for religious education.

Although all the Chapters in the thesis partly answered this objective, Chapter Nine emphasised some of the most important implications digital narratives have for religious education. The Chapter emphasised that changing contexts, such as the introduction of the digital world, should impact how education takes place. Narratives can impact how tolerant a society is and whether they become lifelong learners. Narratives can assist in showcasing societal inequalities and lead students to contemplate social justice concepts. In all their different forms, narratives are more than just stories; they are a part of the information humans receive daily. Students' empathy, intersectional awareness, and tolerance skills can increase if they learn to work critically with the information they find in narratives. The Chapter also included some broad principles on curriculum development. This included three phases: (i) *How to choose a narrative*, (ii) *Pre-analysis*, and (iii) *Post-analysis*. This segment should give educators tools to navigate narrative and curricula if read in context with the rest of the study.

#### 10.2. To identify religious studies professionals' roles in encouraging the responsible creation of digital narratives

In this subsection, the following sub-themes are discussed: (i) *Balance of responsibilities*, (ii) *Content creators* and (iii) *The creation of content*. These sub-themes help explain religious studies professionals' role in creating digital narratives and understanding the balance of responsibilities between content creators and consumers.

### 10.2.1 Balance of responsibilities

- SQ10: What balance of responsibilities are found within the production and consumption of digital narratives?

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Eight contributed to this objective. Chapters Four, Five, and Six focused on content creators and content receivers' responsibilities. Content creators need to create responsible content that will have the least negative impact on narrative receivers. The problem is that conflicting considerations of what responsible means may be found within society. This does not dismiss content creators from creating responsible content. Content creators do not always create responsible narratives; concepts like typecasting, stereotypes, and biased depictions may occur. These concepts often arise from the content creators' concepts, simulations, affective realism and intersectional understanding of the world. Pointing these concepts out to students in class settings can enable students to understand these depictions for what they are rather than letting them affect their affective realism.

Content receivers are responsible for maintaining their constructs, simulations, affective realism and intersectional understanding of the world in a responsible and acceptable manner within their society. Their constructs of responsibility may be very contextually bound, and this thesis was not focused on a specific context, nor does the researcher want to take away people's freedom of conscience. What is considered responsible will be contextually bound to societies and individuals. As students may be content creators and receivers today, they may need to consider both sides of the spectrum. Concepts such as narrative theories and narrative compositions may aid students in evaluating narratives and maintaining healthy constructs. Students who are content creators may also utilise these two concepts but rather reflect on how this can potentially impact the narrative receiver. Chapter Five added that content creators have a responsibility not just toward their local community but also toward their global audience. Content consumers may not find themselves in the same context as content creators. When analysing narratives, it can be advantageous if content consumers can consider the narrative creator's context.

Many pre-digital narratives are also available online. If content creators are separated in time from the modern world, their context needs to be considered. Modern understanding and norms should not be forced on classical narratives. Instead, content consumers should try to understand the writings from the context of the content creator's time. As concepts may have shifted from the era in which the narrative was written to the era in which it is consumed, the narrative consumer has a significant responsibility in such a case to maintain their constructs

healthily. It would be beneficial to add some context of the narrative creators if available within educational settings. By adding information on the narrative creator and showing the relevance of their context, educators can encourage students to consider such information in their future use of narratives. Different mediums may affect the content consumers' affective realism differently (individually bound). It would be advantageous for students to evaluate their relationship with different narratives and consider their influence. Some mediums, like documentaries, may be seen as more fact-based, putting much responsibility on the content creator to create responsible content. Content consumers should be aware of the memetic, synthetic, and thematic concepts in all mediums of entertainment and internet narratives.

Chapter Six stated that the responsibility between the content creator and the content consumer may shift depending on the medium of internet narrative used. News and websites are more passive narrative forms from the consumer's point of view. Both these narrative forms have (in their own manner) credibility and authority lent to them by the mediums. However, biased and misinformed narratives may be found in any medium, and all mediums should be considered critically. The seeming legitimacy of information found within websites and news shifts the responsibility burden toward the content creator while not dismissing the responsibility of content consumers. Social media is a more active narrative form depending on how the consumer uses the technology. The bigger the digital footprint of narrative creators, the greater responsibility lies with them. How active social media consumers are on the platform may impact their measure of responsibility. The more active the consumer is, the more responsibility is taken on; for example, someone who shares a lot of content or comments on posts has a greater responsibility toward those they may influence. Narrative consumers are responsible for maintaining their constructs regardless of how active they are. All internet narrative mediums can be shared with ease; content consumers must critically evaluate narratives before sharing or forwarding content.

Chapter Eight stated that when identity-related concepts, including but not limited to religion, nationalism, secularism, and culture, are simulated in digital narratives, it can impact the content consumer. Content creators should be aware of this impact and try to mitigate such impacts through a well-rounded depiction of the phenomena. Strong us-versus-them narratives frequently arise that do not give well-rounded views of phenomena when working with identity-related concepts. With this being the case, content consumers should especially evaluate narratives when strong identity ideologies exist. Another concept to consider concerning the responsibilities is those responsible for creating policy on narratives. Policies

from platforms or government agencies often dictate what can and can not be broadcasted or published. These policies can be beneficial in mitigating intolerant and harmful simulations that can arise. It would be beneficial for religious education specialists to be part of creating such policies. Some problems may arise with policies that seek to mitigate narrative content. This includes but is not limited to censorship, which may impact freedom of expression, non-implementation of policies, corrupt implementation of policies, unlawful attainment of banned content through the internet and promoting intolerant narratives by creating a sensationalistic phenomenon by banning the content. The responsible creation and implementation of policies should also be considered in the balance of responsibilities, as they can impact the responsible creation of narratives.

### 10.2.2 Content creators

- SQ3: How can religious studies encourage content creators to work responsibly with the information they contribute to digital narratives?
- RG7: To encourage content creators in digital fields to relay information accurately and responsibly.

Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six and Eight contributed to this objective. Chapter Six added that narrative creators are not only a few novelists and filmmakers; they also contribute to narratives and have much sway. However, many people, including students, create narratives today, primarily through internet narratives; it is vital to encourage students to be responsible content consumers and creators (if they create content). Religious education specialists may have direct access to content creators in their classrooms and lecture halls. Chapter Four stated that content consumers should understand narrative theories and the potential impact that their narratives can have on content receivers. This can make them more aware of the responsibility of being a content creator. Content creators should be urged to evaluate the narratives they create, break down different components of narrative and think about the possible impact of these different factors before publishing or posting narratives.

Chapters Two and Five stated that narrative creators should focus on creating humanised characters rather than stereotype marginalised groups. Antagonists will inevitably be cast; however, care must be taken not to perpetuate inaccurate ideologies. It would be advantageous not to typecast marginalised groups in antagonistic positions. Groups and traditions should not be depicted irresponsibly, for example, making them only a token or seen as exotic, neither should they be stereotyped or demonised (thematic understanding). One of the ways to humanise characters is to showcase them with multiple intersections rather than as flat characters. Chapters Five and Eight stated that it is complex for an outsider to truly grasp how

a group would receive a depiction of themselves in narrative form. It would be advantageous for narrative creators to consult the groups they depict. This can lead to more responsible narratives with well-rounded characters that can facilitate better para-social interaction. This process may be eased if religion studies professionals can help facilitate channels between religious groups and narrative creators. This is not to say that some channels do not already exist in this regard. This has limitations, as the content creator and depicted group would have to be willing to work on the narrative together and mitigate the content between them.

### 10.2.3 The creation of content

- SQ9: What role can religious studies professionals play in creating responsible digital content?
- PC10: The encouragement of creating accessible and accurate information.

Chapters Two, Four and Eight added to this objective. All three Chapters encouraged religious studies professionals to promote or create counter-narratives that can contrast intolerant narratives. Chapter Eight stated that discrimination patterns often emerge because of significant world events and a thematic understanding of such events. Chapters Four and Eight highlighted that intolerant narratives also emerge because of the spread of propaganda and conspiracy theories within society. If counter-narratives are to be made, it would be beneficial if religious studies professionals keep track of some of the latest propaganda and conspiracy theories that circulate. The creation of counter-narratives should consider narrative theories and composition. Counter-narratives are more effective than fact-based learning when dealing with misinformed narratives.

It is not always easy for content consumers to find counter-narratives or to know what information to trust online. By creating trustworthy, humanising counter-narratives that stand in contrast to intolerant narratives in circulation, educators can help alleviate some problems in finding trustworthy counter-narratives. If educators do not want to create counter-narratives, promoting trustworthy counter-narratives created by others would be beneficial. Working with content creators to create trustworthy counter-narratives that can be promoted through university or institution platforms may also be beneficial. Furthermore, creating humanising narratives outside the context of propaganda can help people learn about religions. However, if educators feel more comfortable creating fact-based learning information that is accessible and understandable by the general public, this will already make a difference. This will especially be the case if a connection between trustworthy information and University websites can be formed, helping content consumers find a reputable information base.

10.3 To identify how these professionals can play a role in interpreting digital narratives

In this subsection, the following sub-themes are discussed: (i) *Interpretation of narratives*, (ii) *Well-informed or ill-informed digital narratives* and (iii) *Catalogues*. This subsection showcases how religious studies professionals can encourage the responsible use of information by interpreting narratives. It should be stated that the researcher does not imply that researchers are not analysing narratives or that they are not taking these factors into account. Instead, this serves as a guide for those who wish to know more.

#### 10.3.1 Interpretation of narratives

- SQ4: What role can religious studies play in interpreting digital narratives?

Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight contributed to this objective. The immense impact that narrative can have on the human mind, acting as a temporary affective realism, makes it crucial for educators to analyse narratives critically, as this may benefit their students and the academic community. This being said, creating such content for the public may also be advantageous as it can help them understand narratives in more detail. Chapters Five and Six stated that when educators want to utilise narratives within education settings, analysing the narrative before showcasing it to students would be advantageous. This can help the educator isolate critical elements that will be important to point out to a class, including well-informed and ill-informed simulations in the narratives. Educators can prepare some specific questions to ask the students to encourage interaction. Open or broad questions may also assist as students experience the narrative uniquely from the educator. A pre-analysis can be utilised to create articles or can become part of a catalogue to assist other educators with their class preparation. Chapter Two emphasised the use of narratives to simulate definitions to students. It would be advantageous if educators assign definitions they believe would work with narratives in articles, as this may assist other educators in identifying such simulators. Chapter Four stated that if educators seek to evaluate narratives either for cataloguing their phenomena or writing articles, it will be beneficial to consider narrative theories and compositions as part of their analysis. This can include viewing public perceptions of narratives. This can be achieved through interviews or online opinions; this may lead educators to identify characters with favourable para-social interaction. Alternatively, narratives that are rated well by the public may indicate good transportability. Furthermore, positive and negative elements of narrative compositions should be evaluated. This can benefit other educators in locating appropriate narratives, and it may help narrative creators analyse their own work.

Chapters Seven and Eight added some compact narrative analyses and a catalogue of narratives containing religious and (in)tolerant fragments as examples. Chapter Seven focused on general religious phenomena found in digital narratives. Religious phenomena in narratives should be analysed for their potential as simulators and for promoting curiosity. Chapter Eight stated that big world events often create storms of narratives. These usually start as internet narratives and may transition to digital entertainment as time passes. These storms can overwhelm the public and scholars who follow the narratives. These narratives are very obtainable and can be interpreted by those who feel up to the task. Interpreting intolerance and counter-narratives may lead to a different view on the mass amount of information. This may aid other educators, students, and the general public in better understanding the narrative phenomena. However, the interpretation of narratives should not be limited to big world events.

### 10.3.2 Well-informed or ill-informed digital narratives

- PC2: Showing that not all digital narratives are well-informed on religion, even when it does contain religious concepts.
- PC3: Demonstrating that some digital narratives can be very accurate and valuable when cultivating religious tolerance in a multi-cultural society.

Chapters Four, Seven and Eight contributed to this objective. Chapter Four emphasised that misinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories exist on digital platforms. Students will inevitably encounter such narratives, some of which will have information on religion. Ensuring that students are aware of such narratives is essential. If there are underlying reasons the narratives use religion in a negative light, like scapegoating, fundamentalistic belief systems or nationalist ideological pursuits, to name a few, this should be pointed out to students. Students should also be made aware of counter-narratives; counter-narratives can act as a potent teaching tool in religious education settings. Chapter Seven added a catalogue of narratives that simulated ritual, myth, symbol and spirituality. The narratives in the Chapter had neutral or positive depictions within the catalogues. Some exceptions, such as the *Bioshock Infinite* (2013) narrative baptism scene and the news articles regarding symbols and the responsibility of spiritual leaders and songwriters, had a more negative ethos. The catalogues showcase that narratives simulate religious constructs and should be evaluated for their educational possibilities.

In Chapter Seven, there were three *Narrative evaluation example* subsections. These subsections contain the analysis of narratives in more detail to showcase the phenomena and how they can be used in education settings. Two of the narratives can be categorised as lived religious experiences. The first was under *Ritual*, and the other under *Spirituality*. The narrative

under *Ritual* was Bialik's (2018) recounting of her son's Bar Mitzvah; this was a non-fiction social media narrative. The narrative under *Spirituality* was Joseph's (2022) spiritual experience regarding Ramadan; this was a non-fiction website audio clip. Both these narratives are well-informed, positive para-social interaction simulators that can aid humanisation and tolerance in multi-religious societies. Their experiences are memetic but should not be seen as thematic. The other narrative was a fictional, filmographic clip of the *Percy Jackson And The Olympians* series created by Riordan and Steinberg (2023-2024). This narrative contains *Myth* and *Symbols* and can be used to encourage curiosity in students about the memetic and synthetic concepts in narratives.

Chapter Eight added a catalogue of narratives that showcased secularism, nationalism, fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, Islamophobia, Antisemitism and minority-majority relationships. This Chapter showcased intolerance and counter-narratives on religion and related social phenomena. Creating social awareness of these phenomena is part of the work of educators in the digital age. Intolerant narratives are not new and have not been caused by the digitisation of narratives. Instead, the digital age spreads these narratives more easily than could be managed previously. Intolerant narratives often promote fundamentalistic us-versus-them identity theories that paint others as threatening. Other discriminatory narratives seek to distort historical and current discriminatory events. This being said, counter-narratives are also more obtainable through the digitisation of narratives. These narratives are valuable tools for creating better tolerant societies through narrative simulations and para-social interactions. The digital age makes it paramount that education settings give attention to such narratives.

In the subsection *Narrative evaluation example*, two examples of narratives were given. The two narratives act as counter-narratives to the thematic understanding of all Jewish and Muslim people as being part of the Israel-Hamas war. This thematic understanding has led to an influx of Islamophobic and Antisemitic behaviour in many countries that are removed from the war. The first narrative was a non-fiction, social media narrative with the lived experience of Meherun Hamid and Shanaz Syeda (TRT World 2023). They recount a bomb threat that was raised against an Islamic preschool in England that directly correlated with a thematic understanding of the war. The second narrative was a non-fiction social media narrative with Eyal Yakoby's lived experience (The Economic Times 2023). He recounted the Antisemitic actions taken on University Campuses in America that directly correlated with a thematic understanding of the war and the University leadership's lack of action regarding the incidents. Both these narratives stand as counter-narratives that should be able to work as a para-social

interaction simulator to the overwhelming amount of hate narratives fuelled by the current war. This is not unique to this world event, and such a thematic understanding of events transpires regularly, as seen in Chapter Eight. Therefore, big world events and their narratives are one of many points of interest for religious education specialists to explore for educational purposes.

What narratives should be utilised in education settings will be contextually bound. What problems are currently found in society will play a role in choosing narratives. What subject matter is taught and what groups are discussed will intrinsically play a role in the chosen narratives. Factors like minority-majority relationships may affect what narratives may benefit a specific context. Educators should consider if there is an intolerant thematic understanding of specific groups within their society, as this may impact what narratives may be most beneficial. Educators should consider what misinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories may be circulating, as these narratives may impact content consumers. Intolerant narratives often lead to an intolerant, synthetic, thematic view of groups. These views should be countered by counter-narratives that humanise these groups. Most of all, educators should utilise counter-narratives to counter intolerant views of some groups as threatening a specific way of life.

### 10.3.3 Catalogues

- PC12: Providing a small catalogue of narratives with specific phenomena relevant to religion and (in)tolerance.

Chapter Seven added a small catalogue showcasing fragments of religion. These fragments or concepts connected to religion included ritual, myth, symbol and spirituality. Chapter Eight added a small catalogue showing simulations of counter-narratives and intolerant phenomena. These themes included secularism, nationalism, fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, Islamophobia, Antisemitism and minority-majority relationships. The catalogues found in Chapters Seven and Eight included digital entertainment and internet narratives in their different mediums; both fiction and non-fictional narratives were present. The catalogues are available under headings marked as *Examples from digital narratives*. These narratives are not explored in great detail as the thesis is not a curriculum for a specific context. In both Chapters, the headings *Narrative evaluation example* can be found where some compact analysis of narratives is present. These narratives are explored in more detail but should still be adaptable and expandable to different contexts.

#### 10.4 Adding to the overall conversation of scholarly definitions

This subsection discussed the ongoing conversation of scholarly definitions and how this thesis contributed to this conversation.

- PC13: Providing new definitions to add to the ongoing conversation of scholarly definitions.

It should be noted that this thesis did contribute many definitions to the scholarly conversation. However, four definitions were selected from the work of other scholars. These five definitions included the definition of (i) concepts, (ii) simulation and (iii) affective realism; these definitions were selected from the work of Barrett (2018:27, 28, 284) (see Chapter One). The fourth definition that was utilised from another scholar's work was the definition of (iv) critical thinking, as given by Uzunöz et al. (2018:81) (see Chapter Four). The final definition selected from another scholars work was the definition for empathy as given by Chang et al. (2021:3-4). These five definitions were expressive enough to convey the researcher's meaning without the need for new definitions to be constructed. With this in mind, the researcher did not construct these definitions, which are not featured in the following list.

From this point on, a list follows of the definitions that were constructed for the thesis by the researcher. Chapters One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, and Eight contributed to this objective. The definitions were created by using the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework consisted of construct, simulation, intersectionality and affective realism. The definitions created by using the theoretical framework created a bridge between concepts and disciplines. The definitions established a continuity that formed a crucial part of the methodology utilised in the thesis. In Chapter One, unique definitions were constructed for (i) intersectionality and (ii) religion. These definitions contribute to the conversation on definitions for these two constructs. The definition of intersectionality is found under the *Theoretical framework* heading. The definition of religion can be found under *Defining religion*. The researcher did not produce the terms construct, simulation, affective realism, or intersectionality. However, how they are used together to create new definitions throughout the thesis also adds to the conversation of definitions within academic conversations. These four concepts were discussed under the *Theoretical framework*.

Complex terms like religion can benefit from definitions constructed in this manner as they are complex phenomena. Showcasing the intersections between concepts and simulations can provide broad but detailed definitions. As the thesis was written with a broad context in mind, having a broad but detailed definition is beneficial. The same strategy can define specific

communities, creating narrow and detailed definitions. This will depend on the needs of each particular study. Religious education and definitions of religion are deeply entangled with each other. By showcasing the complex intersections of religion, one can also see how complex religious education needs to become to create a varied understanding of the phenomena among students. The varied constructs and simulations of religion among humans need to be considered and understood to promote tolerance. By educating students about how the human mind works, they may learn intersectional sensitivity.

A definition of (iii) tolerance was created and presented in Chapter Two. Tolerance is a key term within the thesis, as religious education for the current study is in the pursuit of tolerance. However, tolerance may have different meanings. Therefore, clarification on what is meant by the term in the thesis was necessary. The thesis added to the conversation by suggesting creative learning opportunities regarding teaching definitions. Using narratives as simulators to illustrate definitions can potentially increase students' understanding of the different definitions of concepts. The researcher added a unique definition for (iv) religious education in Chapter Three. Religious education is a primary term in the thesis, and as there are many simulations of religion in education, clarification was necessary by defining the term.

The researcher constructed unique definitions of the following terms in Chapter Four: (v) character, (vi) us-versus-them, (vii) plot, (viii) passive and active narrative, (ix) discourse, (x) fiction and non-fiction, (xi) technology (xii) digital narratives (xiii) misinformation, (xiv) conspiracy theories, (xv) propaganda, (xvi) counter-narratives, (xvii) religious narrative and (xviii) narrative. Narrative is one of the main terms of the thesis. The definition of narrative contributed in this Chapter is comprehensive, but not much attention is given to the definition of narratives in scholarly works; the thesis thus adds to the body of knowledge. Furthermore, all the definitions found within this Chapter contribute to a better understanding of the definition of narrative. The definitions also contribute to the understanding of terms that are often encountered within the thesis.

In Chapter Five, the researcher added definitions of the different digital entertainment mediums discussed within the thesis. Definitions were added for (xix) books in electronic mediums, (xx) filmography, (xxi) video games, (xxii) virtual reality and (xxiii) music. In Chapter Six, the researcher contributed three definitions of internet mediums utilised within the thesis. These definitions included (xxiv) websites, (xxv) social media and (xxvi) news. Examples of the mediums mentioned in Chapters Five and Six were utilised in Chapters Seven and Eight,

necessitating the clarification of the terms. These terms form part of Chapter Four's definition of digital narrative and, in turn, narrative; therefore, these definitions enhance those definitions. In Chapter Seven, the researcher added definitions for the terms (xxvii) ritual, (xxviii) myth, (xxix) symbol and (xxx) spirituality. These terms intersect with religion, enhancing the definition of religion found in Chapter One. The researcher contributed definitions in Chapter Eight on the following terms: (xxxii) secular age, (xxxiii) post-secular age, (xxxiv) secularism, (xxxv) nationalism, (xxxvi) fundamentalism, (xxxvii) terrorism, (xxxviii) Islamophobia, (xxxix) Antisemitism, and (xl) minority and majority religious dynamics. These definitions intersect with religion or tolerance, enhancing those definitions. The primary function of the definitions found in Chapters Seven and Eight was to clarify these terms as they were used as concepts to find narrative simulations. These narrative simulations were used to create catalogues that can be found under the headings *Examples from digital narratives*. Furthermore, examples of narratives containing some of the phenomena were analysed and contextualised for their educational probability. The examples can be found under the *Narrative evaluation example* headings. Therefore, clarifying what these terms meant in the thesis was important. The researcher contributed thirty-nine definitions that help contextualise critical terms and terms connected to them. These definitions should lead to a better contextualisation of what the thesis means with specific terms. The following Chapter is the conclusion to the thesis.

## Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

This Chapter proceeds as a conclusion to the thesis. The first subsection of the Chapter gives a summary of the (i) *Thesis Chapters*. This Chapter also discusses (ii) To whom is this study of interest and (iii) Limitations and suggestions for further research. The Chapter ends with some (iv) Concluding remarks.

### 11.1 Thesis Chapters

This section gives a brief overview of each Chapter within the thesis. This section is a reminder of what was done in each Chapter, with the following subsection's *Overall objectives* in mind.

#### 11.1.1 Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One was primarily intended as an introduction to the study. This Chapter discussed the following headings: (i) *Background to the study*, (ii) *Problem statement*, (iii) *Objectives* ((iii.i) *Research questions*, (iii.ii) *Research goals*, (iii.iii) *Proposed contributions* (iv) *Themes*) (iv) *Theoretical framework*, (v) *Methodology*, (vi) *Defining religion*, (vii) the *Chapter outline and literature overview* and (vii) *Chapter themes*. This Chapter acted as a foundation for the thesis.

#### 11.1.2 Chapter Two: Tolerance

Chapter Two discussed the topic of tolerance. Tolerance was a crucial term for this study. This Chapter discussed the following headings: (i) *Debate on the concept of tolerance*, (ii) *Different scholarly definitions of tolerance*, (iii) *Working definition*, and (iv) *Chapter themes*. This Chapter clarified the term tolerance in scholarly work and contextualised the term in the thesis.

#### 11.1.3 Chapter Three: Religion and education

Chapter Three investigated the complex simulations of religion in education. This Chapter included the following: (i) *Debate on religion and education*, (ii) *Important Elements that influence religion education*, (iii) *Working definition*, and (iv) *Chapter themes*. This Chapter clarified what the term religious education meant in the thesis (non-confessional). However, many of the concepts within the thesis are transferable to other simulations of education.

#### 11.1.4 Chapter Four: Narrative

Chapter Four investigated the term narrative. This Chapter included the following: (i) *Debate on the concept of narrative*, (ii) *Narrative composition*, (iii) *Digital narrative and digital technology*, (iv) *Conspiracy theories, propaganda misinformation, and counter-narratives*, (v) *Religious narrative*, (vi) *Different scholarly definitions of narrative*, the (vii) *Working definition*, and (viii) *Chapter themes*. This Chapter was crucial in understanding and analysing narratives in the thesis.

#### 11.1.5 Chapter Five: Digital entertainment

Chapter Five discussed the concept of digital entertainment. The following main headings were found in this Chapter: (i) *Books in electronic mediums*, (ii) *Filmography*, (iii) *Video games and virtual reality*, (iv) *Music*, (v) *The use of digital entertainment in religious education*, and (iv) *Chapter themes*. This Chapter was vital in understanding the different mediums of digital entertainment and some of their implications for implementation.

#### 11.1.6 Chapter Six: Internet narratives

Chapter Six focused on the concept of internet narratives. The main headings in this Chapter were: (i) *Websites*, (ii) *Social media*, (iii) *News*, (iv) *The use of internet narratives in religious education*, and (v) *Chapter themes*. This Chapter was essential for understanding the internet narrative mediums and their implications for implementation.

#### 11.1.7 Chapter Seven: Terms relevant to religious education

Chapter Seven explored Four *Terms relevant to religious education*. The terms explored included (i) *Ritual*, (ii) *Myth and Symbol*, and (iii) *Spirituality*. Each subsection had (i.i; ii.i; iii.i) *Discussion and semantics*, (i.ii; ii.ii; iii.ii) *Working definition*, (i.iii; ii.iii; iii.iii) *Examples from digital narratives*, and a (i.iv; ii.iv; iii.iv) *Narrative evaluation example*. The Chapter then concluded with an (iv) *Chapter themes* section. This Chapter was essential to showcase that concepts connected to religion are simulated in digital narratives and can be a potential resource.

### 11.1.8 Chapter Eight: Digital narratives and religious (in)tolerance

Chapter Eight showcased how narrative and religious (in)tolerance interact, showcasing the implications from the previous Chapters. The following headings were utilised in the Chapter: (i) *Secularism and nationalism*, (ii) *Fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism*, (iii) *Islamophobia, Antisemitism, and minority-majority relationships*. Each section contained a (i.i; ii.i; iii.i) *Discussion and semantics*, and (i.ii; ii.ii; iii.ii) *Working definition*. The chapter then continued to the (iv) *Examples from digital narratives*, (v) *Narrative evaluation example*, and (vi) *Chapter themes*. This Chapter showcased intolerance and counter-narratives within the digital world that can affect content consumers.

### 11.1.9 Chapter Nine: Implications for religious education and broad principles for curricula

Chapter nine gave the overall (i) *Implications for religious education*, (ii) *Broad principles regarding digital narratives and curricula* and (iii) *Chapter themes*. The *Broad principles regarding digital narratives and curricula* were discussed in three phases, namely (ii.i) *How to choose a narrative*, (ii.ii) *Pre-analysis*, and (ii.iii) *Post-analysis*.

### 11.1.10 Chapter Ten: A discussion of the objectives and themes

Chapter Ten discussed the thematic analysis of the overall objectives (SQ, RG and PQ). The main themes discussed in this Chapter included: (i) *To identify the religious studies professionals' roles in using digital narratives in education environments*, (ii) *To identify religious studies professionals' roles in encouraging the responsible creation of digital narratives*, (iii) *To identify how these professionals can play a role in interpreting digital narratives* and (iv) *Adding to the overall conversation of scholarly definitions*. The subthemes included (i.i) *Factors to consider*, (i.ii) *Digital narrative a creative source*, (i.iii) *How religious studies and media studies can benefit each other*, (i.iv) *The responsible and ethical use of narratives*, (i.v) *Critical thinking abilities and digital narratives* (i.vi) *Tolerance and the responsible use of digital narratives*, (i.vii) *Post-secularism and digital narrative*, (i.viii) *Narrative quantity in daily use*, (i.iv) *Implications for religious education and curriculum development*, (ii.i) *Balance of responsibilities*, (ii.ii) *Content creators* (ii.iii) *The creation of content*, (iii.i) *Interpretation of narratives*, (iii.ii), *Well-informed or ill-informed digital narratives* and, (iii.iii) *Adding to the overall conversation of scholarly definitions*. These themes gave an overview of the findings in the thesis.

### 11.1.11 Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

This Chapter is the concluding Chapter of the thesis. The headings in this Chapter included (i) *Thesis Chapters*, (ii) *To whom is this study of interest*, (iii) *Limitations and suggestions for further research*, and (iv) *Concluding remarks*.

### 11.2 To whom is this study of interest

First and foremost, this study can interest religious studies professionals who want to know more about the relationship between religion and the responsible use of narrative. Secondly, this thesis interests digital narrative users who want to understand the relationship between digital narratives and religion. Lastly, this thesis can be helpful for narrative creators who would like to know more about the responsible creation of narratives.

### 11.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

This thesis was mainly focused on quantitative research. Qualitative fieldwork and qualitative literature reviews can be helpful in future research to deepen the understanding of the phenomena of religion in narrative. Research on the topic of narrative is quantitative and qualitative. Researchers can follow quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the phenomena better in future research. Points of interest for future research include the cataloguing and analysing narratives for articles and publicly accessible knowledgebases. This may assist educators in their search for narratives for educational settings and may assist students and the public in expanding their understanding of specific narratives. It is encouraged that educators write articles on how they utilise different narrative mediums in education settings, further pointing out successes and limitations, as this can aid other educators in the future. It should be stated that educators (e.g. Reuber (2011; 2010), Kozlovic (2023), and Barnhouse (2023)) have already contributed extensively to how they use digital media within class settings. This study mainly focused on (in)tolerance factors regarding religion and narrative. However, intolerance can occur in many different phenomena. Future research can expand on how other fields benefit from narrative as a creative teaching tool. This can include tolerance toward people of different sexual orientations (as noted in the work of Schiappa et al. (2005)) people with disabilities (as noted by Chopra and Pannu (2018)) and people from different ethnicities (as noted in the work of Praszquier (2016) and Peck et al. (2013)) to name a few.

Chapter Four stated that narrative significantly impacts one's physical body. For example, it was noted that heart rate and eye blink synchronisation occur when narratives are consumed.

This can act as a bonding agent and was seen in the work of Nomura et al. (2015:2) and Pe´rez et al. (2021:7). It was beyond the scope of the thesis to do a complete analysis of this phenomenon. Future research should examine narratives' impact as a bonding agent and if they can assist in building interreligious relationships. Different mediums should be analysed for their effects on the human mind while comparing them to other mediums. This may aid educators in knowing what type of narrative may have the best effect in creating more effective learning environments. Such a study would have to consider individualisation preferences and transportability while considering learning curves with unknown mediums. Chapter Five further pointed out that future research should focus on how video games may act as a bonding agent between players. It may be possible that playing video games together can promote interreligious bonding and is a viable point of investigation for future research. The ethical implications of narratives on the human mind are an ongoing topic that needs further exploration. Although articles like the one by Kissel (2021) can be a good resource for the moral implications of video games, future research can further investigate this topic.

In Chapter Three, it was suggested that different educational programs be created for adults and children to attend together or for adults at their place of work. Educating adults can ease educating children (explained in Chapter Three); complete elaboration was beyond the scope of the thesis. Further research can explore non-traditional avenues to educate people on non-confessional religious matters. Chapter Five showed that digital entertainment may aid the learning process for all students, including neurotypical and neurodivergent students. Future research can focus on the effect of digital narratives in educational settings in both groups. Neurodivergence may include many factors, such as people who have symptoms of Dyslexia, ADHD and Autism, but are not limited to these groups. These groups may vary widely; therefore, exploring each group may also be necessary. Neurodivergent students may struggle more than their neurotypical counterparts in typical education systems (King 2022). If digital narratives can assist neurodivergent students in the learning process, it is worth exploring in future research. Chapter Five indicated that future research can focus on how different teaching styles can incorporate digital narratives into curricula.

This thesis focused mainly on the use of already existing narratives. Some researchers, like Gottesman (2017), encouraged the creation of narratives by students, and Warsihna et al. (2021) encouraged the creation of audiobooks by educators. Creating new narratives and their implications should be a point of investigation for future research. Another factor mentioned for future research in Chapter Four was the role of Artificial intelligence in creating narratives

and how this impacts the responsibility of the narrative consumer. If programs become narrative creators, narrative consumers' responsibility may increase as the narrative creator is no longer an entity that can assume responsibility. The role of Artificial intelligence in creating narratives should be explored in more detail in future research. Another point of future research for the Chapter involves whether consuming smaller narratives over time with the same content can have a similar effect as consuming one extensive narrative. Larger narratives like books may substantially affect simulation, transportation and para-social interaction, leading to cultivation. If, for example, a social media influencer posts similar content constantly and their followers consume it regularly, what would the impact of those narratives be? If it has similar effects as more time-consuming narratives, the choice in these narratives may have significant repercussions.

Another factor pointed out for future research in Chapter Four is how less important misinformation may impact people's affective realism. Not all misinformation is created with the intent to harm, nor does it necessarily have a significant effect on society. However, future research may need to look at what happens when these misinformed narratives accumulate, as this may have a more significant effect. Future research can also delve into the differentiation between dialogue and discourse as terms for verbal communication in narratives. The term dialogue is often used in narrative studies, yet discourse may be more inclusive. A study may thus be needed to delve into the semantics of the terms. In Chapter Six, there is a differentiation between social media, websites and news. These concepts often intersect and may not be seen as different. Future qualitative studies can investigate if education target groups view these concepts as different or the same, as it may impact how religious education engages with these mediums in education settings.

In Chapter Seven, it was pointed out that Myths have a transportation effect on the human mind. Future research can focus on the differences and similarities between Mythology and other narratives within the human mind (see Chapter Four for more on narrative theories). This should be conducted without reducing myths to narratives. This thesis was not overtly focused on myths. Instead, myths were only focused on where they were encountered within digital narratives. The Mythology section briefly touched on the concept of religious truth, as myths stand as truth to the believing communities. Chapter Five also mentioned that content creators should consult the groups they want to depict to ensure an accurate understanding of their religious truth and avoid stereotypical depictions. However, the understanding of truth can differ even within the same group, so a future study can thus work on the concept of religious

truth and depictions in digital narratives. Chapter Eight stated that the scope of the thesis was limited to specific religious discrimination patterns such as Islamophobia, Antisemitism and a small quantity of minority-majority relationships. Other discriminatory phenomena are not less important or less worthy of exploration. Future research should seek to explore these and other discriminatory phenomena, as narratives are everchanging.

#### 11.4 Concluding remarks

Narratives have been used by humanity for millennia. Narratives have multiple functions, all of which are not yet fully known. Narratives are a tool to escape the physical world and are a form of entertainment. Narratives are a resource through which humans can learn. Most of all, narratives are created by humans to influence other humans. In the digital age, humans receive a massive influx of daily information through narratives. In the current era, multi-religious and multi-cultural societies are a reality. There is a need to create and maintain functioning multi-religious societies, which is a point to strive toward for religious education. Narratives contain simulations of (and about) religious phenomena. These simulations can be positive and accurate, creating a simulation of para-social interactions and creative methods of learning constructs. Narratives can potentially create lifelong learners through the mass amount of information available in the digital world.

However, narratives can perpetuate intolerance, scapegoat individuals or groups, and be used to fuel ideological agendas. Religious education is one of the ideal mediums to assist with media and narrative literacy. Two questions will remain open-ended as individual educators hold the answers to these questions. Firstly, is the resource of narrative being utilised to its full potential in religious education settings? Secondly, have religious education settings given students the tools to understand and utilise narratives responsibly? The narratives on the screen of digital narrative consumers today may perpetuate the (in)tolerance of tomorrow. Learning how to analyse digital narratives critically through religious education may help decide the outcome.

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## ANNEXURE A: Ethical clearance letter



Faculty of Theology and Religion

Research Office  
Mrs Daleen Kotzé

29 November 2021

NAME: Mrs M Strydom  
STUDENT NUMBER: 13246179  
COURSE: Doctoral  
DATE: 29 November 2021  
APPLICATION NUMBER: T092/21

This letter serves as confirmation that the research proposal of this student was evaluated by:

- 1) **The Research committee:** This applies to all research proposals
- 2) **The Research Ethics committee:** This applies only to research that includes people as sources of information

You are hereby notified that your research proposal (including ethical clearance where it is applicable) is approved.



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Prof E van Eck  
Chairperson: Research committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion



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Dr T van Wyk  
Chairperson: Research Ethics committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion