Self-exploration, anonymity and risks in the online setting: analysis of narratives by 14–18-year olds

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# Keywords

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* Social mediation
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* Risks and harms

## Sample

258 youth (mean age 15.4 years, 56% female)

# Abstract

This article explores youth narratives of Internet risks and opportunities brought aboutby user anonymity. Using an essay-based study of 258 youth (mean age 15.4 years,56% female), we examined youth narratives concerning the effects of Internetanonymity on youth behavior online. Narratives were written anonymously tomaximize disclosure. The needs categories of self-determination theory (SDT) forautonomy, relatedness, and competence were used to identify risks and opportunities inyouth narratives. The analysis of the data was thematic, using both quantitative andqualitative methods with SDT providing an effective descriptive framework. Quant-itative thematic analysis showed that 17% of the narratives included a notion ofcompetence, 32% autonomy and 30% relatedness. Risks were also prevalent in thenarratives, with primary themes of 74% cyberbullying and insults, 27% identity theftand risky false identity, and 18% sexual harassment or exploitation. The qualitativeanalysis underlines the interaction of both risks and opportunities in the use of socialmedia online by youth. These findings illuminate both the importance of Internetopportunities as a social tool for youth need fulfillment toward self-determination andthe social risks that youth Internet use involves

# Outcome

Anonymity in internet provides in 17% of the narratives a notion of competence, 32 % autonomy and relatedness. 74% of youth indicated that it is enables cyberbulling and insults, 27% indicated identity theft possibility and risky false identity, 18% brought out sexual harassment or explotation.