Have You Asked for It? An Exploratory Study About Maltese Adolescents’ Use of Ask.fm

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
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## Sample

18 participants (9 males and 9 females) who took part in the focus group. 4 individual interviews (3 males and 1 female) aged 11 to 16 years.

# Abstract

This article focuses on adolescents’ use of anonymous social networking sites (SNSs). Their perceptions and attitudes toward one such platform, Ask.fm, are discussed using the framework of uses and gratifications theory to explore motivations for using it. Four focus groups and four interviews were carried out with 22 Maltese adolescents (10 female and 12 male) aged 11 to 16 years. Thematic analysis of data collected was undertaken to identify and develop themes relevant to Ask.fm use. Findings indicate that the platform is a space where adolescents interact with others as part of their identity exploration. The role of anonymity was salient throughout. Ask.fm users were aware of the risks related to using the site; yet, the possibilities for fun, peer acceptance, and identity exploration may be driving them to experiment with this risky behaviour. The implications arising from these exploratory findings may be applicable to other anonymous SNSs.

# Outcome

"Results show that participants used Ask.fm for killing time and recreational purposes. They also used it to be part of their network of peers who do so, and through self-presentation and social interaction, they engaged in identity exploration." (Farrugia et al., 2019; pp. 745-747).
"Participants enjoyed seeing their friends being asked and answering questions. They enjoyed being asked questions about themselves." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 747).
"The possibility of being asked questions anonymously also seemed to be something that the participants found appealing and tempting." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 747).
"Participants felt the pressure to be accepted by their group of peers." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 747).
"This pressure, both external and internal, made some of the participants get an Ask.fm account." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 747).
Participants were concerned "when people asked questions to others and not to them. When they did not receive questions or comments, like others did, they asked themselves whether there was something wrong with them or whether they were lacking something in comparison with others." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 748).
"The reactions obtained are a way of getting feedback about oneself." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 749).
"Participants feel that through Ask.fm, both friends and people they do not know get to know more about them. They seem to think that through answering questions, they will get to know more about themselves and what others think of them." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 749).
"Participants were aware that anonymity on Ask.fm entailed risks" (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 749)(eg. circulation of rumours, sexual content…). "Whereas some users considered Ask.fm as a game, others got hurt." (Farrugia et al., 2019; p. 750).