



# DESIGNING FOR ONLINE BEHAVIORS OF ANONYMOUS USERS

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# Overview of research

- For this research paper the following topics will be studied to understand the users:
  - *Effect of anonymity on behaviors of users in online settings*
  - *The difference of bullying verse cyberbullying and the relationship to anonymity*
  - *Types of users who are more apt to engage in negative behaviors*
  - *Anonymity balance of promoting participation verse negative behaviors*
  - *Reviewing the possible psychological reasons and the “online disinhibition effect”.*

# Goal of findings

- Evaluating if offering anonymous interactions should be offered and the negative effect of removing them for the success of a product.
- Reviewing possible interaction changes and reviewing other website changes to find design patterns that can help avoid negative interactions.

# Terminology

- “Trolling”, which is seen as someone who purposely tries to anger or cause argument with the author or other posters by posting off-topic items or controversial topics.
- “Cyberbullying”, while bullying in school age children is nothing new cyberbullying has been escalated and frequently includes topics and bullying techniques that can be viewed by the entire world, which has escalated to causing stress, depression and even suicide

# Online Disinhibition Effect

- This effect can have two opposite effects
  - *some users it may promote them to open up and share more personal things about themselves*
  - *others it may expose a more rude and hateful person who looks for the darker side of themselves*
- The ideal is that when the user is given the opportunity to separate their real life from their online actions and persona, they can feel empowered and not have the fear that might be associated with being personally linked to their behaviors or expressions

# Anonymity

- It is possible that the user feels they are not visible and real-world attributes of themselves do not apply.
- A user may feel they can attack or bully others online and their own physical weakness or inadequacies cannot be viewed by the victim.
- This is also related to dissociative practices where some users do not connect their actions to the outcome that can happen from them; this is even more seen in actions toward dehumanized entities

# Social Norms

- The social norms might also be a defining factor for the new technological frontier.
- The ability to post instantly and communicate behind a keyboard without any connection to the real person.
- This can lead to the standards being set by a prime, or someone who is more outspoken, and this behavior can then be followed by the other users.
- It is possible that social behavior is only enforced by fear of the consequences

# Case Study: Facebook

- While Facebook does usually link to a user there is no requirement to prove you are a specific user or even use a real name or picture. Therefore, the ability to be anonymous on Facebook still exists
- Facebook has introduced new methods to deal with hateful and bullying posts and comments by auto blocking and hiding posts based on key and offensive words as well introducing features for other users to report comments and posts on the behalf of the user who received them



# Case Study: *Popular Science*

- Attempted to deal with negative comments by removing the ability to comment completely from their website.
- Comments, especially those made by anonymous users were affecting the integrity of the scientific articles they posted and that many of the negative or hateful comments would cause a reader to not believe or comprehend the indented meaning of the article
- Anonymous comments which were mostly uncivil in nature and usually contrary to the original post
- The “nasty effect” which would lead to other users having their perception of the article skew

# Findings

Finding the right balance of these for the specific platform being created will be difficult and pushing the **design to over-enforce any concept can lead to loss of users or users simply moving to other platforms who allow what they need.** The balance should be **skewed based on the target audience of the platform.** For example, due to the ever-growing concern of cyberbullying and the mental impact on school age children this demographic should lean toward a more humanized interaction with less openness and less anonymity. Therefore, ensuring that users are held responsible for their actions same as they would be in a real-world school environment. Finding the balance for all applications is a difficult **task for a User Experience professional but will be critical to ensure a safe online world for all** users and a platform that meets its interaction goals and facilitates community benefits.

Thank you

Questions?

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