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**THE EFFECTS OF ANONYMITY ON ALGERIAN STUDENTS' ONLINE  
BEHAVIOUR AND IDENTITY PRESETATION  
CASE STUDY: STUDENTS OF DJILALI BOUNAAMA UNIVERSITY OF KHEMIS  
MILIANA**

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Candidacy for the Master's  
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# **ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION**

## **Declaration**

We hereby declare that this dissertation under the title of "The Effects of Anonymity on Algerian Students' Online Behaviors and Identity Presentation among Djilali Bounaama University of Khemis Miliana" is our own work, and all external sources have been acknowledged correctly and explicitly. We have not previously submitted this work or any part thereof for a degree or diploma at this or any other university. This research paper was conducted respecting all the ethical considerations for conducting a study.

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### **Dedication**

*With a most profound respect and gratitude to the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, whose guidance and knowledge illuminate the path of seeing truth. May this work, in its humble way, reflect the spirit of lifelong learning he championed. Dear shining parents, words cannot express the depth of my gratitude for your unwavering love and support throughout my whole life; you have been the constant source of light that illuminated my darkest moments of doubt and the unwavering force that propelled me forward. Believing in my abilities has been the wind beneath my wings, allowing me to soar the heights I never thought possible. May this accomplishment bring a smile to your face. To my brothers and sisters, your love and encouragement have been a constant source of strength; thank you for believing in me always. To my lovely teacher and supervisor, Mrs. Aziza Koran, your guidance, support, and patience have been instrumental in shaping this work. What you have done for us is something that will never be forgotten. I am deeply grateful to you for being such a blessing gift and being there for us in each step. Without forgetting my dear lovely friend Wissem, my soul mate, your friendship and encouragement have brightened the journey. Thank you for being such a light in my life, and thank you so much for our existence. I dedicate this work with unconditional love and gratitude to my family members and everyone who believed in me.*

**Ms. Nassima Khedda.**

*I dedicate this dissertation to the people who have played a significant role in my journey to becoming a master's degree holder. First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents, who have always been my greatest supporters and always believed in my abilities, providing me with the unwavering support necessary to pursue my*

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**Ms. Wissem Cherrani .**

*First and foremost, this work is mainly and wholly dedicated to Allah, the creator of the universe. I offer all of these to you. Additionally, it is sincerely dedicated to my beloved parents, who have been my Source of inspiration and give me strength and love when I thought of giving up who continually provide their moral, spiritual, emotional, and financial support. I would like to dedicate this work to my teacher and supervisor, Mrs. Aziza Koran, who constantly guiding and teaching us to make this study even better, to my family, sisters, and brothers who have helped me during my academic journey. I, also and always, would like to express my deepest and most sincere thanks to my beloved best friend and the moon of my life Wissem, you was always there for me in thick and thin , I'm so grateful to have you in my life .and I'm forever thankful for all that you do for me .your kindness, generosity, and sense*

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*of humor never cease to amaze me, and I'm so lucky to have you as friend. you are always here in my heart and you are definitely one of Allah's greatest gifts to me.*

**Ms. Fethia Kouider Moussaoui.**

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## Abstract

The rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has compressed the world, creating a tight-knit virtual village within a boundless digital landscape. This interconnectedness allows individuals to easily communicate and interact. Understanding how anonymity influences online behaviour and identity construction is increasingly important due to the rise of online platforms. This research investigates the effect of anonymity on online behaviour and identity presentation in the Algerian context. Specifically, it explores how anonymity influences user behaviour, online identity presentation, and its relationship with netiquette guidelines. The study hypothesizes that while anonymity may embolden some users to behave poorly online, it can also allow for more authentic self-expression. A convergent parallel mixed method design was employed, utilizing an online questionnaire distributed via email to 23 randomly selected students at Djilali Bounaama University of Khemis Miliana. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 21, whereas the qualitative data was thematically analysed. Thematic analysis of participant discussions revealed that anonymity can have a positive effect on online behaviour. Students reported feeling more confident sharing and expressing themselves online when their real identity was hidden. This newfound confidence allowed them to explore different facets of their identity and express themselves more authentically, all while adhering to high standards of netiquette.

**Keywords:** information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), virtual village, online platforms, anonymity, behaviour, online identity, netiquette, Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students.

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## **Résumé**

La croissance rapide des technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) a compressé le monde, créant un village virtuel très uni au sein d'un paysage numérique sans limites. Cette interconnectivité permet aux individus de communiquer et d'interagir facilement. Comprendre comment l'anonymat influence le comportement en ligne et la construction de l'identité est de plus en plus important en raison de l'essor des plateformes en ligne. Cette recherche étudie l'effet de l'anonymat sur le comportement en ligne et la présentation de l'identité dans le contexte algérien. Plus précisément, il explore la manière dont l'anonymat influence le comportement des utilisateurs, la présentation de l'identité en ligne et sa relation avec les directives de netiquette. L'étude émet l'hypothèse que si l'anonymat peut inciter certains utilisateurs à se comporter mal en ligne, il peut également permettre une expression de soi plus authentique. Une méthode mixte parallèle convergente a été utilisée, utilisant un questionnaire en ligne distribué par courrier électronique à 23 étudiants sélectionnés au hasard à l'Université Djilali Bounaama de Khemis Miliana. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide de SPSS version 21, tandis que les données qualitatives ont été analysées thématiquement. L'analyse thématique des discussions des participants a révélé que l'anonymat peut avoir un effet positif sur le comportement en ligne. Les étudiants ont déclaré se sentir plus en confiance pour partager et s'exprimer en ligne lorsque leur véritable identité était cachée. Cette confiance retrouvée leur a permis d'explorer différentes facettes de leur identité et de s'exprimer de manière plus authentique, tout en adhérant à des normes élevées de netiquette.

**Mots clés :** Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication (TIC), village virtuel, plateformes en ligne, anonymat, comportement, identité en ligne, netiquette, étudiants universitaires Djilali Bounaama.

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### ملخص

أدى النمو السريع لتكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات إلى ضغط العالم، مما أدى إلى إنشاء قرية افتراضية متماسكة داخل مشهد رقمي لا حدود له. يتيح هذا الترابط للأفراد التواصل والتفاعل بسهولة. إن فهم كيفية تأثير إخفاء الهوية على السلوك عبر الإنترنت وبناء الهوية أمر متزايد الأهمية بسبب ظهور المنصات عبر الإنترنت. يبحث هذا البحث في تأثير عدم الكشف عن هويته على السلوك عبر الإنترنت وعرض الهوية في السياق الجزائري. وعلى وجه التحديد، فهو يستكشف كيف يؤثر عدم الكشف عن هويته على سلوك المستخدم، وعرض الهوية عبر الإنترنت، وعلاقتها بإرشادات آداب التعامل مع الإنترنت. تفترض الدراسة أنه على الرغم من أن إخفاء الهوية قد يشجع بعض المستخدمين على التصرف بشكل سيئ عبر الإنترنت، إلا أنه يمكن أن يسمح أيضًا بالتعبير عن الذات بشكل أكثر أصالة. تم استخدام تصميم الطريقة المختلطة المتوازية المقاربة، وذلك باستخدام استبيان عبر الإنترنت تم توزيعه عبر البريد الإلكتروني على 23 طالبًا تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا في جامعة الجيلالي بونعامة بخميس مليانة. تم تحليل البيانات الكمية باستخدام برنامج SPSS الإصدار 21، في حين تم تحليل البيانات النوعية موضوعيًا. كشف التحليل الموضوعي لمناقشات المشاركين أن إخفاء الهوية يمكن أن يكون له تأثير إيجابي على السلوك عبر الإنترنت. أبلغ الطلاب عن شعورهم بثقة أكبر في المشاركة والتعبير عن أنفسهم عبر الإنترنت عندما تم إخفاء هويتهم الحقيقية. وسمحت لهم هذه الثقة الجديدة باستكشاف جوانب مختلفة من هويتهم والتعبير عن أنفسهم بشكل أكثر أصالة، كل ذلك مع الالتزام بمعايير عالية من آداب التعامل مع الآخرين.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات، القرية الافتراضية، المنصات الإلكترونية، إخفاء الهوية،

السلوك، الهوية عبر الإنترنت، آداب الإنترنت، طلاب جامعة جيلالي بونعامة

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## Resumen

El rápido crecimiento de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC) ha comprimido el mundo, creando una aldea virtual muy unida dentro de un paisaje digital ilimitado. Esta interconexión permite a las personas comunicarse e interactuar fácilmente. Comprender cómo el anonimato influye en el comportamiento en línea y la construcción de identidad es cada vez más importante debido al auge de las plataformas en línea. Esta investigación investiga el efecto del anonimato en el comportamiento en línea y la presentación de la identidad en el contexto argelino. Específicamente, explora cómo el anonimato influye en el comportamiento del usuario, la presentación de la identidad en línea y su relación con las pautas de netiqueta. El estudio plantea la hipótesis de que, si bien el anonimato puede alentar a algunos usuarios a comportarse mal en línea, también puede permitir una autoexpresión más auténtica. Se empleó un diseño de método mixto paralelo convergente, utilizando un cuestionario en línea distribuido por correo electrónico a 23 estudiantes seleccionados al azar en la Universidad Djilali Bounaama de Khemis Miliana. Los datos cuantitativos se analizaron utilizando SPSS versión 21, mientras que los datos cualitativos se analizaron temáticamente. El análisis temático de las discusiones de los participantes reveló que el anonimato puede tener un efecto positivo en el comportamiento en línea. Los estudiantes informaron que se sentían más seguros al compartir y expresarse en línea cuando su verdadera identidad estaba oculta. Esta nueva confianza les permitió explorar diferentes facetas de su identidad y expresarse de manera más auténtica, al mismo tiempo que respetaban altos estándares de netiqueta..

**Palabras clave:** Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC), aldea virtual, plataformas en línea, anonimato, comportamiento, identidad en línea, netiqueta, estudiantes universitarios Djilali Bounaama.

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## **List of Acronyms, Abbreviations and symbols**

**APA:** American Psychological Association.

**CMC:** Computer-Mediated Communication.

**DM:** Direct Message.

**DV:** Dependent Variable.

**E.g.,** Example.

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language.

**H:** Hypothesis.

**IBM:** International Business Machines

**ICT'S:** Information Communication and Technologies.

**IV:** Independent Variable.

**MBA:** Master of Business Administration

**ND:** No Date.

**PhD:** Doctor of Philosophy

**SIDE:** Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effect.

**SIT:** Social Identity Theory.

**SPSS:** Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

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# **ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION**

## **Chapter One, Introduction**

This study investigates the impact of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behaviour. It explores the perceptions of university students of Master's degree in Djlali Bounaama khemis Miliana University toward masked identity "anonymity". The first chapter briefly describes previous studies about online identity and anonymity. Then, the statement of the problem moves to the rationale of the study, aims and objectives of the study, the research questions, the hypotheses, the significance of the study, the research methodology and tools, limitations, definition of key terminology, ethical considerations as well as the discussion of the dissertation's structure.

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

Everyone wonders who they are; that is what "identity" is about; who we think we are and how others see us. It mixes our beliefs, roles, experiences, and even where we grew up. Understanding identity helps us navigate life for ourselves and as a part of a group. According to the journal "Understanding Your Online Identity, An Overview of Identity", the characteristics that mark who we are can be experiences, values, attitudes, behaviors, even the school we attended and the shoe size. The sociologist Erving Coffman (1959) concluded that in addition to these characteristics, context and audience play a significant role in shaping what is called identity; according to him, a person can have more than one identity because people present themselves differently based on when and where they are (context) and whom they are with (audiences). However, in the digital age, these characteristics differ and take new forms; according to the previous journal, these characteristics online may include the web we enter, the sites we visit, the products we buy, the pages we follow, the posts we like even the stocks we follow whether it is us behind the keyboard or not. Authors Wiszniewski and Coyne, in their book "Building the Virtual Communities," show that when people are

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anonymous online, they might act differently and even create a completely new online personality, different from who they are in real life. Christopherson (2006) views online interaction as a costume party; you choose a username instead of your real name, an avatar instead of your face, and posts instead of talking directly. It is like wearing a mask that lets you hide some things. This "masking" is called anonymity, which means people online might not easily know who you are, which may change their behaviour, creating different personas.

### **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

The world is shifting gradually from a traditional to a networking society after the wide spread of ICTs, leading to a revolution in communication and information access, shaping the world as a tiny village and vast digital space where individuals connect, communicate, interact and express themselves. Anonymity plays a vital role in shaping online interactions. While it offers individuals the freedom to talk, express themselves, and share their thoughts in presenting diverse identities, it also has some risks to individual behaviours and communication as a whole and the overall health of the digital environment.

Despite the growing concerns about online anonymity, no research about the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation in the Algerian context has been found or published (neither in Google Scholar or Academia Web or any site), thus leading to looking further to investigate this study in the Algerian context.

### **1.3. The Rationale of the Study**

After the widespread adoption of ICTs, a vast concern surrounding online anonymity led to many studies exploring the concept of anonymity and its impact on online behaviours. For instance, in a study by Barlett (2016), Gettysburg College surveyed college students and portrayed the negative effect of anonymity results that the more people feel that they are anonymous online, the more likely they cyberbully others and report engaging in cyberbullying behaviours.

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In 1981, Mann's study showed that anonymity is a direct reason for some crimes, such as suicide. Zimbardo's study in 1969 concluded that anonymity is the inability of others to identify or single out an individual such that he cannot be evaluated, criticised, judged, or punished. Christopherson's (2006) study about the positive and the negative implications of anonymity in internet social interaction assumed that one could be completely anonymous but still express thoughts and emotions without fear of being identified and socially evaluated.

However, studies done in the Algerian context were not published or found in Google Scholar or any other professional or academic site. Therefore, this needs further investigation, as it provides valuable insights for promoting a safe, ethical online environment for all Algerians.

### **1.4. The Research Aim**

This study investigates and explores the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behaviour on the Algerian university students of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana.

### **1.5. The Research Objectives**

Three main objectives were set to achieve the main aim of the study:

- To explore anonymity's potential benefits and drawbacks for online interactions and identity construction.
- To examine the influence of anonymity on various aspects of online behaviours.
- To explore the way individuals present their online identities when anonymous.

### **1.6. The Research Questions**

**Q1:** How does anonymity influence online behaviours and communication patterns?

**Q2:** How does anonymity affect the way individuals present their online identities?

**Q3:** Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?

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## **1.7. The Research Hypotheses**

In the light of the research questions, it is hypothesised that:

**H1:** Anonymity online leads individuals to misbehave.

**H2:** Anonymity online enables individuals to present their online identities more authentically.

## **1.8. The Significance of the Study**

The present study is significant for the following reasons:

Algeria has a rapidly growing internet population, with over 50% of the country online. However, little research exists on how Algerians behave and interact online, particularly in comparison to offline behaviour. This study could illuminate unique patterns and trends specific to the Algerian context.

Anonymity online allows individuals to present themselves differently than in real life. This study could explore how Algerians utilise anonymity to express themselves, challenge societal norms, or engage in activities they might otherwise avoid.

Online anonymity can play a significant role in social and political discourse, particularly in countries with limited freedom of expression. This study could analyse how anonymity influences online discussions, activism, and dissent in Algeria.

## **1.9. Research Methodology and Tools**

This study investigates and explores the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and individuals' behaviour in Algeria for this a mixed method design is used; the quantitative one is common in educational research to collect, analyse and interpret the required data (Creswell, 2012) through an online questionnaire

The qualitative one is to study the perception of anonymity and its effect on masked identities in and behaviours the Algerian context through thematic analysis.

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The study was conducted at Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University, Ain Defla, Algeria, with Master's degree students; participants were randomly chosen in the second term of the academic year 2023/2024.

### **1.10. Limitations**

While offering valuable insights into the unique Algerian online landscape, our study like any previous research, faced some boundaries and limits that prevented researchers from gaining richer insights.

The study was limited by time; this was an obstacle to achieving a deeper investigation of the topic. Therefore, a detailed study would be done, and richer results would be found if time was enough and the study was done over a long period.

Obtaining data from specific online platforms or communities was challenging due to privacy restrictions or ethical concerns.

There are no published studies about the same research topic in Algeria; only minimal studies have been done, but they are not accessible due to privacy concerns.

Regarding the literature review of our study, the researchers reckoned on studies done outside Algeria because no research has been done in Algeria about this topic. Thus, the results cannot be generalised to the Algerian context due to each country's unique characteristics.

The sensibility of our topic, which is identity and anonymity, participants can give false answers to some questions due to the fear of being judged; for example, if a question asked in our questionnaire like: Did you cyberbully someone when you were anonymous, participants may feel scared from being judged if they did that therefore they may give false answers.

### **1.11. Definition of Key Terminology**

The following section deals with the familiar words related to the topic of this research:

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### ***1.11.1. Identity***

*Identity* has been defined as "unitary" or "multiple", "real" or "constructed", "stable" or "fluid", "personal" or "social", and in many other ways that often seem to contradict each other (Vignoles et al., 2011). as a very basic starting point, identity is the human capacity-rooted in language- to know who's who' (and hence what's what'). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are. (Jenkins, 2014, p.5)

### ***1.11.2. Online Identity***

Kim et al. (2011) defined online identity as the digital manifestation of a person's core identity. Ruyter and Conroy (2002) defined online identity as the combination of characteristics that help define a person in cyberspace and make him or her different from other online users.

### ***1.11.3. Anonymity***

Anonymity generally refers to "the inability of others to identify an individual or for others to identify one's self" (Christopherson, 2007, pp. 3039-3040).

Anonymity means specifically removing or obscuring the names of participants or research sites and not including information that might lead participants or research sites to be identified (Walford, 2005)

### ***1.13.4. Behavior***

According to Bergner (2011), behaviour refers to observable actions of an organism, including both physical movements and verbal communication. Tinbergen (1951) defines behaviour as "the total of movements made by the intact animal" (p.2), several authors (e.g., Davis, 1966, p. 2, p. 4; Lehner, 1996, p. 8; Pierce & Cheney, 2004, p. 1) define it as "anything an organism does" (or "what an organism does"), several others define it in terms of any

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activity in which an organism engages (e.g., Donahoe & Palmer, 1994, p. 3; S. T. Watson & Brown, 2011, p. 221)

### ***1.13.5. Social Media***

Social networking sites are the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a public or semi-public profile and view their own as well as other users' online social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)

Social networking sites are the latest online communication tool allowing users to create a public or semi-public profile and create and view their and other users' online social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). For many users, it is commonplace to seek out information (Chen & Wang, 2021)

### ***1.13.6. Digital Society***

The digital society is a concept that recognises such technologies as an embedded part of the larger social entity and acknowledges the incorporation of digital technologies, media, and networks in our everyday lives (Lupton, 2014), Wang et al (2022) stated that the digital society refers to a social transformation driven by the widespread adoption and integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into all aspects of modern life, fundamentally reshaping communication, interaction, and information exchange

### ***1.13.7. Netiquette***

Internet etiquette is a set of core rules explaining what should and should not be done regarding online communication to maintain common courtesy (Shea, 2004). An informal code of practice regulating the behaviour of internet users when using e-mail, bulletin boards, chat rooms, newsgroups, ..." (Strawbridge, 2006).

## **1.12. Ethical Considerations**

Anonymity online raises ethical and legal concerns, such as the potential for online harassment, hate speech, and misinformation. This study could contribute to ongoing

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discussions about balancing online freedom with user accountability in Algeria. It is considered one of the first studies about anonymity and online behaviour in the Algerian context. Before collecting the data, a participant information sheet (Appendix A) was introduced to the sample chosen, enclosing all necessary information about the research as well as the rights of the participants before signing the consent form (appendix B) as approval from their side.

### **1.13. Structure of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is structured into five chapters; the first chapter, or the starting point of this research, introduced an overview of our topic, which is the impact of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behaviours in Algeria and the different perspectives of some scholars about this topic. It also clearly stated the problem addressed and the rationale of the study, as well as the research aim, questions, and objectives; in addition to that, it clearly described the research design used and the tools that suit this paper. The chapter ended with discussing the significance of the study, which limits it faced, and the ethical considerations.

The second chapter was devoted to the literature related to this study and what other scholars found and said about the same topic and their perspectives; it also reviewed the fundamental concepts, theories, and previous studies investigating the same research topic.

The third chapter dealt with the methodology or research design method, including the data collection method, population and sampling, and the instruments used in data analysis.

The fourth chapter presented the study's findings obtained after gathering and analysing the data; the study's results from the detailed Analysis of the data gathered for this study.

The fifth chapter discussed the findings obtained from the previous chapter.

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The last chapter concluded this dissertation by emphasising the basis of the findings obtained and the main results. It also dealt with crucial limitations, the implications and the contributions of the study and ideas for future research.

### **Summary**

This chapter was considered the green light to this research; it was devoted to covering the background of the current study, which is the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and individuals' behaviour in Algeria. A statement of the problem was introduced, as well as the study's rationale, research aims, research questions and objectives, research hypotheses, research methodology, tools, and participants. Also, the limitations that controlled our research and definition of the keywords or variables in this study. Ending this chapter with some of the ethical considerations and the structure of our dissertation.

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## **Chapter Two, Literature Review**

Due to the rapid expansion of ICTs, anonymity has equally been evolving. A new feature was added to Facebook in which individuals can post, share, and comment anonymously without disclosing their identity (Grover, 2024). While there was a significant debate on online anonymity, it remains neglected in Algeria as no research paper was found on any academic website until February 2024. This study focuses on studying online anonymity in the Algerian university context since it is the crucial period of identity development and increased independence compared to other stages (Finn. 2020). This chapter enclosed the existing body knowledge to address the study's aim, and it is structured as follows: starting with a theoretical background, dealing with anonymity and online behaviour, anonymity and identity presentation, anonymity and online social norms, anonymity and educational contexts, moving on to some of the cultural and contextual considerations as well as some challenges and opportunities, ending the chapter with gaps in the literature and a summary

### **2.1. Research Aim and Objectives**

This study investigates the effect of anonymity on individuals' behaviour and identity presentation in the Algerian context among Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students. The research study's main objectives are:

- To explore anonymity's potential benefits and drawbacks for online interactions and identity construction.
- To examine the effect of anonymity on various aspects of online behaviours.
- To explore the way individuals present their online identities when anonymous.

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## **2.2. Research Questions**

In order to conduct the investigation, the researchers asked the following questions aiming to solve at the end of the study:

- How does anonymity influence online behaviours and communication patterns?
- How does anonymity affect the way individuals present their online identities?
- Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?

## **2.3. Research Hypotheses**

In the light of the research questions, it is hypothesised that:

**H1:** Anonymity online leads individuals to misbehave.

**H2:** Anonymity online enables individuals to present their online identities more authentically.

## **2.4. Online Anonymity**

In the article "A brief introduction of online anonymity" (2018), the term anonymity is derived from the Greek words "an", which means without, and "onoma," which means name. Therefore, it is viewed as simply being without a name. Being anonymous online means hiding one's identity so other users or companies cannot see or identify who you are.

Christopherson (2006) stated that anonymity means the inability of individuals to identify a person or for others to identify oneself. "A widespread interpretation of anonymity by the common layperson is the inability for an individual to be identified by others" (Zimmerman, 2012, p.10)

Online anonymity has been defined differently throughout the years; each scholar views it from his/ her perspective. According to Marx (1999), someone is truly anonymous when

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nobody can identify him/her in seven key ways: real name, location, linkable pseudonyms, non-linkable pseudonyms, pattern knowledge, social categorisation, and symbols of eligibility and non-eligibility.

However, Suler (2004) defined anonymity online as one of the key factors behind the online disinhibition effect, Lapidot and Barak (2012) focused their operational definition of online disinhibition on the manifestation of hostile behaviour towards others in online communication. This means they viewed online disinhibition primarily through negativity and aggression. Being anonymous means that individuals feel unseen and act differently than they would in real life. They may feel less responsible for their actions as no one can judge them; this can be like separating their online world from their real world, letting them say or do things they would not normally do; they may even convince themselves that their online behaviours do not reflect who they indeed are.

Anonymity means the inability of individuals to identify a person or for others to identify oneself (Christopherson, 2006). Zimmerman (2012) stated that "A widespread interpretation of anonymity by the common layperson is the inability for an individual to be identified by others" (p. 10).

Overall, anonymity online means that the individual is unknown or unidentified on the internet or in cyberspace, where his /her personal information is hidden and unseen by other users, companies, or organisations. This feature leads people to act differently, positively or negatively.

### ***2.4.1 Anonymity Types***

Anonymity online has two subtypes: social and technical anonymity (Hayne & Rice, 1997)

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### **2.4.1.1. Social Anonymity.**

Social anonymity means that others cannot identify one due to the lack of cues available to attribute an identity.

### **2.4.1.2. Technical Anonymity.**

It means that a person is entirely unidentified during online interaction and communication.

## **2.5. Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE)**

Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb (1952) used the term deindividuation to describe the effect of a crowd or group on the behaviour of an individual. Festinger et al. claimed that, as a result of this restraint on an individual's usual behaviour, the individual becomes "able to indulge in forms of behaviour in which, when alone, they would not indulge" (p. 382) Diner(1980) claimed that anonymity causes people to lack awareness of who they are as individuals, leading them to misbehave and keep engaging in aggressive activities, which facilitates deindividuation where individuals are able to engage in some aggressive behaviours in which when being alone, they would not engage.

In 1969, the American psychologist Zimbardo of Stanford University conducted a study on anonymity and behaviour. He suggested that when individuals are anonymous, they lose their sense of identity and awareness. Zimbardo hypothesised that the more anonymous individuals are and the more they hide their real identities, the more they engage in violent and aggressive activities (Exploring Online Anonymity, 2018).

Zimbardo, in his experiment, set two groups of female participants. The first group was given hooded jackets, which concealed their identity, and the second group wore their jackets with their names to be easily identified, he then asked the participants to give an electronic shock to the female participant; a confederate (fake shock). The study's result was that the

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anonymous group delivered to the girl a strong and for the longest period in comparison with the identifiable group. This finding supported Zimbardo's point of view and his hypothesis that anonymity encourages anti-normative behaviours and aggression and that individuals feel desensitised when being anonymous, leading to a lower sense of self-control and individuality, thus a reduction in their sense of fear from the consequences (who is that? The study of anonymity and behaviour, 2018).

Mann, Newton, and Innes (1982), in the book "The Role of Anonymity in Deindividuation Behavior", stated that this theory directs that anonymity protects one from social disapproval or rejection. However, Nitschinsk et al. (2023) viewed the deindividuation theory differently; according to him, this theory only sometimes has negative outcomes. Anonymity sometimes makes people bolder, which can lead to bad things like cyberbullying or mean comments online. However, it can also make people more willing to follow the group, even in doing good things like helping others online and advising them.

### **2.6. The Online Disinhibition Effect Theory**

In 2004, a professor of psychology at Rider University "Suler" published an article entitled "The Online Disinhibition Effect" on online interaction. Suler (2004) described the concept of online disinhibition to be a psychological phenomenon where individuals act and behave differently than they do in real life; people in cyberspace tend to do or say things that they would not say or do in face to face situations, feeling less restrained and can express themselves more freely.

Suler(2004) identify two dimensions to this theory: first, individuals are motivated to share personal information about themselves more than they usually would, revealing their emotions, feelings, fears, wishes and even desires; they are more involved in helping others and showing kindness. This is called "Benign disinhibition". The other type is "Toxic

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disinhibition", when individuals act meaner than they would in real life, including rude language, hurtful words, harsh criticism, anger, hate or threats. Suler breaks down six factors that affect and cause online disinhibition, and they are as follows:

- \* Dissociative anonymity
- \* Invisibility
- \* Asynchronicity
- \* Solipsistic introjection
- \* Dissociative imagination
- \* Minimising status and authority.

### ***2.6.1. Dissociative Anonymity***

"Dissociative anonymity is defined as the degree to which an individual perceives that he /she can hide or change his/her true identity in the online environment "(Mueller et al., 2022, p.1)

Suler (2004) indicates that this can be classified as one of the main factors of the online disinhibition effect theory; sometimes people in cyberspaces tend to interact with others, comment, and surf the web anonymously. Individuals feel protected and can not be judged when they are anonymous, so they do not have to own their behaviours and act differently than how they act in real-world situations; anonymity helps individuals feel less vulnerable about rude behaviours because they will be less worried about real-life consequences for their words and actions. According to Lapidot-Leffer and Barak (2012), individuals respond more toxically and aggressively in an online chat room when they hide their identity or are anonymous.

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### ***2.6.2. Invisibility***

According to Mueller-Coyne et al. (2022), invisibility is the degree to which a person perceives that no one can see him or her physically throughout the online environment. As Suler (2004) described, in many online spaces, especially those based on text, people are invisible to each other. This differs from being anonymous, where names are hidden, but details might be known. In text-based communication, even if details are shared, the lack of seeing and hearing someone directly disinhibits them. They do not worry about how they appear or sound nor about others' reactions like frowns or sighs, which can lead people to say things they would not dare to say face-to-face, similar to how patients feel freer to talk to a therapist who sits behind them. Just like people might avoid eye contact when discussing personal things, text communication offers a way to be "invisible" and express oneself more openly.

### ***2.6.3. Asynchronicity***

According to Suler (2004), online communication in platforms like email and message boards differs significantly from real-time interactions due to its asynchronous nature. Unlike face-to-face conversations, with immediate responses, messages on these platforms can take minutes, hours, or even longer to reply to. This lack of immediate response can lead to disinhibition, meaning people feel less restricted and might express themselves differently compared to real-life situations.

### ***2.6.4. Solipsistic Introjections***

Suler (2004) mentioned that online chat could mess with how we see ourselves without seeing or hearing the other person. "It can feel like our minds are connected, and we imagine their voice in our heads like they're right next to us. We might even picture how they look and act based on their writing. This online friend becomes a character in our minds, shaped by what they share and our own ideas and wishes. It is like filling in the blanks based on people

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we already know or things we've seen in stories." The more detailed and real this imaginary friend becomes, the more online chat can feel like a conversation inside our heads, like writing a story.

Many people have these kinds of imaginary conversations outside online friendships throughout the day. We might imagine flirting with someone, arguing with our boss, or being honest with a friend. In our imaginations, where it is safe, we can say and do things we would not dare in real life. At that moment, our imagination becomes our reality. Reading someone's online message can also make us "hear" their voice in our own head. We might unconsciously sound out the words as we read, making it feel like they are talking to us directly. This can feel like talking to ourselves, making us feel braver to say things we would not usually say to others. For some people, talking to themselves like this can bring up deeper emotional issues.

### ***2.6.5. Dissociative Imagination***

According to Mueller-Coyne, Voss and Turner (2022), some people might imagine their online self and other online users as existing in a separate, fictional world, free from real-life responsibilities and pressures (Wu et al., 2017). This tendency is called dissociative imagination and refers to the strength of one's belief that online experiences are entirely

### ***2.6.6. Minimising Status and Authority***

According to Suler (2004), online people are less influenced by another person's authority than face-to-face interactions. We lack visual cues like clothing, body language, and surroundings that typically signal real-life authority figures. Even if someone knows about an authority figure online, his or her online presence and influence must be stronger. Unlike the real world, where social factors like status, wealth, race, or gender can influence power dynamics, online environments often offer a more level playing field. Here, what matters most is your ability to communicate effectively (including writing skills), persistence, the

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quality of your ideas, and technical knowledge. This reduced sense of authority online can also lead to bolder behaviour. People may be more willing to speak their minds and sometimes even misbehave due to the perceived lack of authority figures and the feeling of being on equal footing with others.

### **2.7. Anonymity and Online Behaviours**

The following addresses the type of relationship anonymity shares with online behaviour.

#### ***2.7.1. The Effect of Anonymity on Online Behaviour***

Zimmerman (2012) presented some positive and negative sides to online anonymity. First, anonymity online makes individuals feel safer and more private, being more open and even form meaningful online connections they might not feel comfortable pursuing in real life, according to Jessup, Connolly and Gallagher (1990) in the book "Online Aggression: The influences of anonymity and social modelling" proved that groups working anonymously can be more creative and productive than those who are not. Therefore, anonymity helps control individuals' personal data; this means one can decide how much information companies collect and who can access it.

Thus, this protects them from security breaches, unwanted surveillance, and intrusive tracking. For instance, online services use cookies and facial recognition to make your life easier, but they can also use this data to target you with specific advertisements. However, anonymity online can impact behaviour because it increases inappropriate, uncharacteristic and negative behaviours in cyberspace; individuals may act in contradictory behaviours in the real world; using CMC, individuals start behaving as they want, being what they want and doing things they want.

According to the article "Anonymity and Identity Shielding", anonymity allows individuals to express themselves more freely online, explore their identities and discuss their

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experiences openly without fearing being judged by family or friends. It can also empower people to criticise authorities and express unpopular opinions without facing threats or persecution.

Christopherson (2006) stated that individuals could be fully anonymous online but still express thoughts without fear of being socially evaluated or judged. Anonymity allows individuals to take a more positive perspective on life and improve their acts.

From another perspective, Kim, Ellithorpe, and Burt (2023) linked online anonymity to digital aggression for many reasons; feeling anonymous makes it less likely that perpetrators will be caught or punished while giving them a sense of power. In addition to the online environment that lacks eye contact, this lack of seeing can lead to less inhibition and make perpetrators feel freer to act out. According to Lapidot-Leffer and Barak (2012), individuals respond more toxically and aggressively in an online chat room when they hide their identity or are anonymous.

### **2.8. Effects of Anonymity on Online Cyber Bullying**

Barlett from Gettysburg College published 2006 an article under the name "Predicting Cyberbullying from Anonymity". In his study, he investigated the longitudinal relationship between perceived anonymity and cyberbullying in college students; he hypothesised that higher perceived anonymity would lead to increased cyberbullying behaviours and examined the mediating role of positive attitudes towards cyberbullying in this relationship. The study employed waves longitudinal design over one academic year; participants in this study (N=146; average age=19.21) completed surveys at four different time points measuring:

\*Wave 01: Measure perceived anonymity; how anonymous felt online

\*Wave 02: Measure attitudes toward cyberbullying and their beliefs about the acceptability of cyberbullying

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\*Waves 03 and 04: Measure cyberbullying behaviors; their self-reported engagement in cyberbullying.

The study found a significant positive relationship between perceived anonymity and cyberbullying behaviours; this relationship was partially mediated by a positive attitude towards cyberbullying: higher perceived anonymity leads to more positive attitudes toward cyberbullying; the more individuals are anonymous, the more they register to engage in cyberbullying behaviours. This study also showed that perceived anonymity could be considered a risk factor for cyberbullying behaviours, leading to more positive views of cyberbullying behaviours, ultimately increasing the likelihood of engaging in such behaviours as one deserves to be cyberbullied.

According to Szezygłowski (2018), online anonymity is often linked to increased cyberbullying behaviours; individuals are more likely to bully online if they feel anonymous. This is because they feel like they will not get caught or face consequences making them more confident and less worried about retaliation. Additionally, people who feel anonymous online might underestimate the real-life harm and lasting effects of cyberbullying on the victim, making them think it is not a big deal and that leads them to send more messages and use harsher language online, which further contributes to the problem, this emphasises how anonymity plays a significant role in making cyberbullying worse.

### **2.9. The relationship Between Anonymity and Online Communication Patterns**

According to Wang (2018), the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) caused a rise of a new feature which is "anonymity", individuals when online see this feature as an important step to protect their freedom of expressing their thoughts and opinions; this feature of masking evolve in all the online activities and interactions using emails, list serves, instant messaging, chat rooms and even video games. Being anonymous in cyberspace and online

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interaction affects both the task or activity and the social aspects of online communication including thought expressing, information exchange, decision-making, relationship development and online connections. Wang (2018) also argued that in addition to what anonymity brings as benefits, it also leads to a rise in negative communication, including rudeness, aggression or hostility; individuals might feel less restricted by social norms, leading to a more casual and unfiltered communication style.

According to Rösner and Krämer (2016), anonymity online can make people less inhibited and more likely to use aggressive language. Additionally, people are influenced by others' behaviour, so if they see others being aggressive in the comments section, they might be more likely to follow suit.

Generally, anonymity affects online interaction and communication positively and negatively, depending on the individuals' attitudes and behaviour in cyberspace.

### **2.10. Anonymity and Identity Presentation**

Sociologists propose several theories that present how people reveal their identities online when anonymously.

#### ***2.10.1. Theories on Online Identity Construction in Anonymous Contexts***

Identity construction in anonymous contexts can be visualised through the following theories:

##### **2.10.1.1. Dramaturgical Theory.**

Goffman developed this theory in his seminal 1959 text "The Presentation of Self in everyday life". According to Goffman (1959), people perform actions in everyday life as if they were performers on a stage. Thus, everyday life is just like a theatre presented on both the front stage and backstage.

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\* Front stage: What is visible to an audience.

\* Backstage: What is unobvious to an audience.

The idea of front- and backstage behaviour can be simplified through the example of a restaurant server. Front-stage behaviour includes paying attention to the quality of food and diners, being polite, and ensuring sanitation. Backstage behaviour involves dropping food on the floor, picking it up, and putting it on a plate to serve the customer on the front stage.

### **2.10.1.2. Social Identity Theory.**

This theory was developed by the psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner to explain how social identity supersedes the need for individual identity. Tajfel and Turner (1979) assert that the groups people belong to are essential sources of pride and self-esteem. They further proposed three mental processes that are central to explaining how people define their in-groups and out-groups:

\* Categorisation: It is based on categorising people to understand the social environment.

\* Social identification: It studies how people adopt the identity of their groups.

\* Social comparison: In this stage, individuals compare their group with others regarding value or social status.

Mummendy and Otten (1998) have revealed in their studies that in-group favouring and out-group derogation are not isomorphic, and people want to compare their in-group to a lower social status out-group to maintain self-esteem.

## **2.11. How Anonymity Affects Self-Presentation and Authenticity Online**

People can present themselves online in different ways using various social platforms that provide unlimited benefits. Bargh et al. (2002) stated that anonymous internet spaces allow

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people to express and present their true selves. Thus, feelings, thoughts, and experiences can be expressed in online anonymous settings without the fear of being judged by others. Studies conducted by Grieve and Washinton (2016), Spears and Lea (1994), and Turkle (1995) have revealed that individuals tend to present themselves in an anonymous online environment due to the lack of vulnerability and judgement from others. Anonymity may also be increased self-disclosed. Scott (1998) stated that self-disclosure to strangers is a typical result of anonymity since people would reveal information to strangers when they believe they cannot be identified and are unlikely to see them again. Another study by Juan and Scott (2007) found that bloggers who use visual anonymity did not reveal more about themselves unlike those who used discursive anonymity tended to self-disclose.

### **2.12. Identity Presentation Differences**

Identity presentation in online settings has been under investigation for more than a decade. Zaho (2006) stated that the online world can be anonymous. Anonymous settings differ from the anonymous environment in several points. In anonymous spaces, people feel free to be anyone they want. However, the anonymous environment limits flexibility and the opportunity to claim any identity ( Brennan & Petit, 2004; Douglas & McGarty, 2001).

Coupled with the previous researchers, Goffman (1959) and Bargh et al.(2002) declare that in an entirely anonymous offline environment where breaking social norms will result in punishment, people's masks in daily life become their true identities, and their actual selves are frequently buried and suppressed. However, in a completely anonymous online environment that lacks accountability, people frequently discard the masks they wear offline and reveal their selves as well as other suppressed identities that are taboo

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### **2.13 Anonymity and Online Social Norms**

According to Tremewan (2015) The shift in behavior stems solely from the reduced incentive to follow social norms when individuals cannot be identified. Moreover, Social norms are fundamental to human behaviour.

#### ***2.13.1. The Concept of Netiquette***

Netiquette, this term has been defined differently by many scholars. The word netiquette is constructed with two parts; "network" and "etiquette", and in previous research, it is defined as "etiquette of the network" (Scheuermann & Taylor, 1997, p. 269)

Hammond and Moseley (2018) viewed it as applying the etiquette rules of courtesy and respect when communicating with others online.

According to Kozik and Slivová (2014), It forms the guidelines for users' conduct on a network. Kumazaki (2011) described it as the ability to judge online behaviour appropriately.

#### ***2.13.2. Importance of Netiquette***

Previous research shows that awareness of netiquette rules decreases the chance of cyberbullying, as being aware of netiquette means knowing what is ethical and what is not (Park et al., 2014). Atalay (2019) stated that empathy is important in being friendly and using netiquette on new media platforms.

A study done in Japan by Kumazaki et al. (2011) suggests that following netiquette regulations can help reduce cyberbullying, especially among secondary and high school students with high ICT skills. It indicates that good netiquette can diminish the augmenting effects of ICT skills on cyberbullying. Additionally, the study highlights that having good netiquette significantly decreased school bullying in elementary and secondary students. Therefore, the benefits of following netiquette regulations as per this study, include reducing cyberbullying and school bullying particularly among students with high ICT skills.

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### **2.14. Netiquette Rules- Adherence or Deviation**

when people are anonymous online, they choose to either feel responsible for their actions or be careless; Suler(2004) posited that "When people have the opportunity to separate their actions online from their in-person lifestyle and identity, they feel less vulnerable about self-disclosing and acting out" (p. 322). When anonymous, people are not held accountable offline for their online communication. Studies have indicated that people exhibit different levels of prosociality in anonymous interactions, often linked to individual differences in moral preferences and social norms. Individuals communicating online may feel anonymous, invisible, and more comfortable disclosing or confronting issues in a virtual setting due to the online environment's often less immediate or depersonalised nature (Roed, 2003; Suler, 2004)

#### ***2.14.1. The Influence of Anonymity When Following Netiquette Guidelines***

When one is anonymous online, the person respecting the netiquette guidelines reflects on the individual's personality.

Online anonymity can reduce personal awareness, facilitate positive social behaviour, and strengthen online connections (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003). Online anonymity also allows individuals to present themselves more ambiguously and express themselves differently (Yan & Tan, 2012).

According to Slack (2023), simple acts of online etiquette can transform social media into a powerful tool for career success, allowing you to build meaningful connections and achieve your professional aspirations while maintaining a positive and respected reputation. It can also lead to a feeling of depersonalisation, making it harder to get to know individual members as unique persons and increasing the feeling of being able to do whatever one wants without fear of identification for censure. (Morris et Al.,2002).

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### ***2.14.2. The Influence of Anonymity in Deviation from Netiquette***

However, individuals online do not always tend to behave when they are online and anonymous. While online communications may encourage those who otherwise feel uncomfortable sharing their viewpoints in a different setting, toxic disinhibition can be seen when communications become aggressive, particularly when sharing personal opinions or responding to criticism in a way that would not occur face-to-face (Suler, 2004a). Common manifestations of toxic disinhibition include online harassment that may result in flaming behaviour, e.g. insulting or offensive comments, swearing, using all caps, threats, or aggressive language and punctuation (Wu et al., 2017).

### **2.15. Community Management and the Enforcement of Norms in Anonymous Online Settings**

Diwanji et al. used social identity theory in their exploration of information behaviour and co-presence in Twitch TV live chats, arguing that social identity processes are at play when it comes to membership in those communities because too many participants "the stream is not only a source of entertainment but a digital community to which they belong and regularly contribute" (2020, p. 6). Diwanji et al.'s (2020) qualitative findings showing how participants perform in-group norms through emotes specific to their communities support this idea. Rösner and Krämer's (2016) experiment showed that verbal aggressiveness in preceding comments predicted verbal aggressiveness in subsequent comments (descriptive norms).

### **2.16. Anonymity in Educational Contexts**

Anonymity in the virtual world exists on many platforms. One of the greatest opportunities that social media offers to individuals is the ability to remain anonymous. While using these applications, individuals can create accounts with their real names and social identities or create a profile with a desired set of characteristics. Even in education, anonymity spreads among learners, and it differs for different purposes and reasons.

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### ***2.16.1. Anonymity Among University Students***

Many students in universities prefer to keep their identities hidden when communicating online, especially on academic platforms; it is widely believed that using anonymity can induce EFL students' higher participation and production in interaction and lower their anxiety in the process, which hopefully leads to international students' academic success and satisfaction in universities and colleges (Hosack, 2004; Chester & Gwynne, 1998). Introverted learners who feel uncomfortable socialising feel at ease when their identity is hidden. Poza (2005) noted that anonymity could decrease students' anxiety in interaction and increase their motivation for learning; Roed (2003) also indicated that anonymity could help students relax and suffer less from their worries in EFL learning.

Xie et al.'s (2013) study discussed earlier found that conflict decreased when faculty promoted a positive social climate. The case studies demonstrate instructor involvement at varying points of interaction with students.

To cope with the new trend of online EFL learning and teaching, anonymity, in which learners' real identities are kept unknown to others by using pseudonyms or not using names at all, is widely employed by host institutions as one of the strategies to facilitate international students' interactive EFL learning (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2011).

From an individual learner's perspective, anonymity in interaction is often associated with deindividuation in language learning (Lu & Han, 2014). The concept describes the employment of anonymity, in which learners "stop thinking of other members as individuals and feel that they cannot be singled out by others" (Jessup et al., 1990, p. 338).

Deindividuation of anonymity reduces learners' inner restraints and frees them from pressures that source from teacher and peer assessment, as it "detaches individuals from their contributions" (Lu & Bol, 2007, p. 102). For international students, who usually have

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different learning motivations, deindividuation can help improve their learning experience and performances by imposing fewer peer pressures and higher participation and production in learning activities (Hosack, 2004)

### ***2.16.2. Role of Anonymity in Educational Online Platforms and its Impact on Learning and Student Interaction***

Teacher involvement allows for two types of interaction in EFL learning: teacher-involved and peer-to-peer (Chou, 2003). To date, there have been several studies that investigated the influence of anonymity on students' engagement, including both their participation and production in interaction for EFL learning (Abrar, 2018; Guardado & Shi, 2007). However, previous studies have not distinguished the two types of interaction in terms of the employment of anonymity (Lu & Bol, 2007; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2011)

For instance, educational research has examined how the disinhibition effect can result in student interactions that include incivility, hostile debate, and the over-disclosure of personal information (Kim, 2018; Suler, 2004b). Wu et al. (2017) similarly found that dissociative anonymity, moderated through deindividuation or feeling that one's identity can be hidden online, increased disinhibited behaviour. In considering how social conflict may arise in an online educational setting. In online classroom environments, uncivil student behaviours include challenging instructor authority or credibility, consumer mentality, missing deadlines, making rude, harassing, hostile, vulgar or offensive comments, academic dishonesty, and sending inappropriate emails or other communications to the instructor or other students (Clark et al., 2012; Galbraith & Jones, 2010).

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### ***2.16.3. Comparative Analysis of Anonymity Effects in Educational vs. Non-educational Online Environments***

In this section, researchers will conduct a comparative analysis of anonymity's effects in educational and non-educational online environments, examining its potential risks and benefits in each context.

#### **2.16.3.1. Anonymity Effects in Educational Environment.**

When examined in an online educational setting, initial research suggests that disinhibition may result in desensitisation and, potentially, conflict within both student and faculty interactions, disrupting the learning environment as well as the relationships between students, faculty and program administrators (Rawlins, 2017; Xie et al., 2013). For instance, educational research has examined how the disinhibition effect can result in student interactions that include incivility, hostile debate, and the over-disclosure of personal information (Kim, 2018; Suler, 2004b). Wu et al. (2017) similarly found that dissociative anonymity, moderated through deindividuation or feeling that one's identity can be hidden online, increased disinhibited behaviour. In considering how social conflict may arise in an online educational setting, Xie et al. (2013) discuss factors that make online learning more susceptible to social conflict, such as a lack of visual or audio cues that may help one sense the tone of the room/conversation. Relatedly, research has also shown that the asynchronous nature of online environments, including online course discussion boards, also correlates to toxic disinhibition and can disrupt the learning environment (Wu et al., 2017; Xi et al., 2013)

#### **2.16.3.2. Anonymity Effects in non-Educational Environments.**

As Williams and Skoric (2005) have indicated, the environments where negative online disinhibition is most commonly observed include online gaming and game sites, hate sites, all social media applications where cyberbullying can occur, the comment and direct message (DM) sections of social media applications, and sites with political formations. In this context,

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online disinhibition is among the causes of cyberbullying. With the disinhibition effect in the virtual world, individuals do not restrain their behaviour in the cyber environment, which means they can become cyberbullies themselves and might also encourage others to engage in such behaviour.

However, as Öztürk and Çalıcı (2018) also mentioned, the disinhibition effect does not always signify a negative connotation. The display of sincere, polite, considerate, and helpful behaviours by individuals on the internet is regarded as a positive online disinhibition effect; in the case of positive disinhibition, individuals feel happier and more comfortable on social media. Users share their curiosities, fears, loneliness, secret emotions, personal details about their lives, and desires with each other. As a result, they receive support and assistance.

### **2.17. Cultural and Contextual Considerations**

Previous studies on this area of investigation indicated that culture influences online anonymity.

#### ***2.17.1. The Influence of Cultural Factors on the Effects of Anonymity Online.***

Al Omoush et al. (2012) studied the impact of Arab cultural values on Facebook, investigating the motivation, attitudes, usage patterns and the continuity of membership values in social networks. The study revealed that social media networks break down restriction barriers in front of Arabic young people, where the latter face many cultural, social, religious, moral and political restrictions (Al Omoush et al., 2012). Lowry et al. (2016) studied adults' cyberbullying and the reasons for cyberbullying, while most of the research works were focused on adolescents. The authors particularly proposed an improved social media cyberbullying model, incorporating the anonymity concept with several features in the learning process of cyberbullying, where the authors focused on the flagship of inappropriate content by analysing 10 million flags related to 1.5 million users. The Analysis figured out

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that most flags were correct, and the deviant users receiving more flags got more replies than ordinary users. Arafa and Senosy (2017) studied the cyber-bullying patterns on 6,740 Egyptian University students in Beni-Suef .The questionnaire responses showed that 79.8% of females receive harassment, while 51.8% of males receive flaming content.

Moreover, feelings of anger, hatred, and sorrow are common among the victims. The data analysis figured out that students from rural areas and medicine students are less exposed to cyberbullying (polite and respectful moral values). Conversely, students living in urban areas and sociology students are more exposed to cyberbullying. A similar study was conducted on a group of Saudian students, where 287 students were selected as a case study among 300 responding to a questionnaire (Al-Zahrani, 2015).

Most of the cyber-bullying studies addressed adolescents and teenagers. For instance, a group of Arab teenagers (114 teenagers) living in Israel was selected to study cyber-bullying and its relationships with emotional aspects (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2016). The study reported that 80% of the students are subject to different forms of cyberbullying, such as spreading offensive rumours, harassment, humiliation regarding physical appearance, and sending sexual content. In addition, the study also figured out that cyberbullying victimisation leads to loneliness and anxiety. The emergence of social media networks in Algeria considerably increases the codeswitching phenomenon, which also occurs in monolingual and illiterate people, because using foreign languages (e.g. French) is seen as a prestigious and elegant way to communicate with people (Abainia, 2020).

### ***2.17.2 . Relevance of Anonymity Studies in the Algerian Context and Comparison with Global Findings***

Abainia (2020) have noticed in previous research that several Algerian users often use pseudonyms reflecting their personalities or imaginations. For instance, if a user feels resilient

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and stronger, he may choose the pseudonym "Gladiator", reflecting a strong personality. In addition, some users write their surnames or pseudonyms using accented characters (e.g. Õ, Û, Ā, Ö, ʔH, etc.) not belonging to the French character set that contains 26 letters and some vowels (é, è, à, ï and î). Several social media users spread fake information about them for various reasons (e.g. keeping anonymity). For instance, some Algerian users make European countries their living countries because they want to migrate there, and they always publish and share status and images about this country. Moreover, it is not so different from other foreign countries. Many internet users use pseudonyms and avatars to hide their true identity.

### **2.18. Challenges and Opportunities**

As every research faces difficulties, this study encountered challenges of its own.

#### ***2.18.1. Ethical Concerns in Researching Online Anonymity***

There are a few ethical concerns that have arisen upon conducting this research. One issue which had been taken into consideration involved the type of participants. At the beginning of the questionnaire, Master 1 students were selected to participate in the research. However, it was hypothesised that the number of participants was insufficient to ensure the credibility of the survey and the research. Master 2 students were added to counter the sample's small size.

Another ethical concern that was considered was the anonymity of participants. To ensure that anonymity was adequately achieved for participants, they did not request their location or any other identifiable information. The only data required included their Gender, age, and answers to the research project.

#### ***2.18.2. Potential Benefits of Anonymity in Fostering Open Communication and Self-Presentation***

Although anonymity has dark sides, it also provides gratifications and advantages:

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Pedersen (1997) stated that anonymous settings allow people to experience new behaviours and actions without worrying about social consequences. Thus, individuals can virtually change who they are without worrying about being recognised and subjected to unfavourable judgement from others they know.

According to some researchers, including Sprecher et al . (2013), anonymous online spaces may also give some people more chances to self-disclose, which is essential for maintaining well-being, fostering closeness, and gaining likeability. In other words, revealing personal information to others may result in people being accepted and liked. The value of privacy for psychological well-being is the most prominent way that anonymity can be beneficial ( Pedersen,1997).

### **2.19. Gaps in the Literature**

While conducting this research, the researchers encountered the following gaps in the literature:

#### ***2.19.1. Identification of the Research Gaps in The Current Literature on Online Anonymity***

Several researchers outside Algeria have studied the effect of anonymity on online behaviour and identity presentation.

Nitschinsk et al (2023) studied the motivations behind wearing anonymous masks in online spaces. The results showed that some people were motivated to seek anonymity to self-express or behave toxically, in addition to gaining specific gratifications from anonymity.

Simfors (2020) investigated how our morals correlate with our degree of anonymity while we communicate online; the author used a social experiment in which participants had the choice to perform an act either altruistically or selfishly. The Analysis found that a higher percentage selected the selfish option when given a name and picture. However, the data also showed that most research participants noticed behaviour change during the two clauses.

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However, through our in-depth research on different Google websites, we found that no researchers in Algeria investigated the impact of anonymity on online behaviour and identity presentation.

In the University of Guelma, Abainia(2022) studied the online behaviour of abusers in the Algerian community on social media networks (Facebook). The Analysis of the questionnaire showed that cyberbullying mainly occurs in politics, and the majority of abusers are addicted to posting selfies and sharing content about politics, sports, and depressing topics.

At the University of Algeria 3, Mokeddem(2021) investigated Algerian students' attitudes toward exploring the blue environment (Facebook). The findings revealed three factors and actions that justify Algerian students' behaviour and attitudes on Facebook, including actions of protection and confidentiality, the daily activities of Facebook, and circumstantial actions.

### ***2.19.2. Opportunities for Future Research***

Future research should consider collecting the data over a long period to ensure that there are more opportunities to contact those who use anonymous platforms because finding anonymous platform users willing to participate in the research is extremely difficult and consumes time. Future research may look into the aspects of why individuals choose to use anonymous platforms over the public for sharing their inner thoughts and presenting themselves.

Future research may ask participants how individuals would react upon seeing someone within their social group and circle post on a Public platform with more self-disclosure and without engaging in censoring behaviour. How would their opinion of the person change, if at all, and why?

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## **Chapter Three, Research Methodology**

The previous chapter was dedicated to the research literature review or the supporting literature for the objectives. This chapter describes the research methodology adopted in this study and the procedures to analyse the collected data. It starts with a reminder of the research aim, objectives, questions, and hypotheses, an overview of the research methodology and design, the dependent and independent variables, setting, and participants, as well as the research procedures, data collection, and analysis. In addition to the ethical considerations and some limitations faced in the chapter, the piloting stage concludes with a summary.

### **3.1. Research Aim and Objectives**

This research paper investigates and explores the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and individuals' behaviour on the Algerian university students of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana, Algeria.

Its main objectives are:

- \* To explore anonymity's potential benefits and drawbacks for online interactions and identity construction.
- \* To examine the effect of anonymity on various aspects of online behaviours.
- \* To explore the way individuals present their online identities when anonymous.

### **3.2. Research Questions**

In order to conduct the investigation, the researchers asked the following questions aiming to solve at the end of the study:

- \* How does anonymity influence online behaviours and communication patterns?
- \* How does anonymity affect the way individuals present their online identities?

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\*Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?

### **3.3. Research Hypotheses**

In the light of the research questions, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Anonymity online leads individuals to misbehave.

H2: Anonymity Online Enables Individuals to Present Their Online Identities more authentically.

### **3.4. Research Methodology**

Sreekumar (2023) defined research methodology as a structured and scientific approach that guides researchers in collecting, analysing, and interpreting data (quantitative or qualitative) to answer research questions or test hypotheses. It functions as a roadmap, ensuring focus and addressing potential limitations and ethical concerns while justifying the chosen data collection and analysis methods for robust and reliable research findings. Additionally, research methodology encompasses three primary approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method, each tailored to specific research objectives.

According to Jansen (MBA) and Warren (PhD) (2023), Research methodology delves into the practical intricacies of research design. It focuses on a researcher's systematic procedures to construct a study capable of generating valid and reliable results that directly address the research aims, objectives, and central research questions.

Several key benefits accrue from employing a well-defined methodology, according to Sreekumar (2023). Firstly, it fosters transparency and replicability by providing detailed explanations that aid other researchers seeking to replicate the study. Secondly, it equips the researcher to address inquiries concerning the research at a later stage readily. Furthermore, a

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strong research methodology offers a framework and guidelines for researchers to define their research questions, hypotheses, and objectives precisely. Critically, it guides researchers in selecting the most appropriate research design, sampling technique, and data collection and analysis methods tailored to their investigation. Ultimately, a sound research methodology safeguards the validity and reliability of research findings by minimising bias and errors. Additionally, it ensures adherence to ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Finally, a well-developed research methodology empowers researchers to plan their studies efficiently, optimising time and resource allocation.

The research methodology used in this study is a mixed-method design. Doyle et al. (2009) described mixed method design as research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather and analyse data in one study and bring it all together to draw stronger conclusions. As George reviewed (2021), the mixed method is very crucial and better than the other methods because it gives the researcher a complete image than a standalone study design (quantitative or qualitative design) after it integrates advantages and results from both methods, using mixed method design help the researcher to put findings in context and conclude with richer detail.

Mixed methods design allows the researchers to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationship between anonymity and online behaviour/identity presentation in the specific context of Algeria(University students of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana) mixed methods design allows to explore the complex issue of anonymity's effect on online behaviour and identity from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Quantitative data (questionnaire, statistics) will reveal trends and general patterns. In contrast, qualitative data (online questionnaire) will provide deeper insights into motivations, experiences, and contextual nuances specific to the Algerian online environment. This combined approach offers a richer understanding than either method could

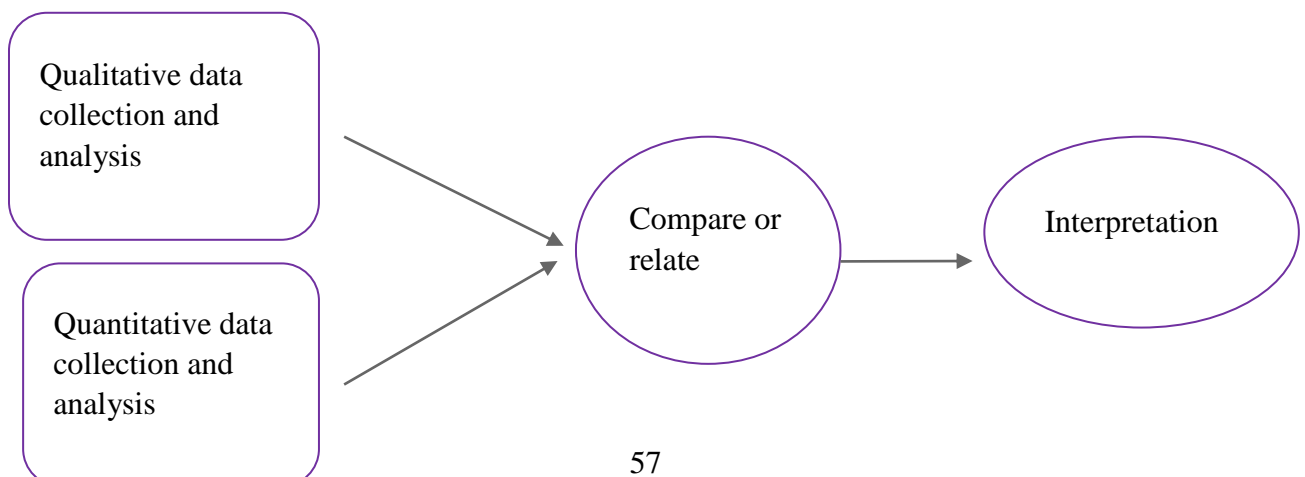
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provide alone. As each approach has a limitation, the researchers can triangulate the findings by using both, meaning that they can compare and validate the results from one method with the other, leading to a more robust overall picture. In addition, quantitative data can show changes in online behaviour based on anonymity levels, while qualitative data can help researchers understand why these changes occur. In understanding Identity Presentation similarly, the quantitative data might show changes in self-disclosure based on anonymity, while qualitative data can then reveal how Algerians construct their online identities differently under anonymity

### 3.5. Research Design

Research design is crucial in any research; it helps the researcher in decision - making in each task from the study and provides accuracy, reliability, consistency, and legitimacy to the study. The research design used in this research paper is the convergent parallel mixed method design or, as Creswell describes it, «the concurrent triangulation design " According to Kroll and Neri (2009), the convergent parallel mixed method design utilises a single, unified study that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods concurrently. Creswell (2014) viewed that in this design, the researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, integrating the findings of the interpretation into the overall results.

**Figure 3.1:** Convergent parallel mixed method design (Creswell, 2014)



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Kroll and Neri (2009) mentioned that the core objective of this design is to strengthen the research findings by employing evidence gathered from one method to validate the results obtained through the other. According to Creswell (2009) this design is crucial and more beneficial than the other designs for its advantages; firstly, its familiarity to most researchers eases the learning curve for those new to mixed method research. Secondly, by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently this approach strengthens the research findings throughout a process of validation and substantiation. Thirdly, a key advantage of this design is its time efficiency; compared to sequential methods where data collection happens in stages, gathering both data types simultaneously shortens the overall data collection timeframe.

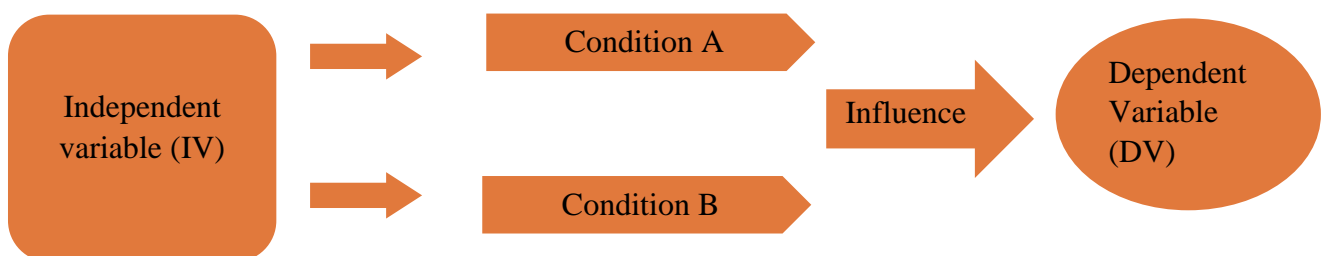
### 3.6. Research Variables

As Mcleod (2023) described, variables in research can be any characteristic or quantity that can be measured in experimental research. There are two types of variables: dependent and independent variables.

#### 3.6.1. Independent Variable (IV)

From Mcleod's point of view (2023), within the field of psychology, the independent variable serves as the core element manipulated by the researcher. This variable is hypothesised to influence the dependent variable directly

**Figure 3.2:** Independent Variable in Research



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### ***3.6.2. Dependent Variable (DV)***

The dependent variable assumes the role of the measured outcome, conceptualised as the effect relationship. The dependent variable is subject to change based on manipulations of the IV; the researcher actively measures this variable to assess the potential impact of the independent variable.

### ***3.6.3. IV and DV of the Research Paper***

This study investigates and explores the impact of anonymity on online identity presentation and individuals' behaviour on the Algerian university students of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana.

\* In this research paper, anonymity is the independent variable; it is the variable that the researchers manipulate or control to see how it affects the dependent variable by manipulating the level of anonymity participants experience online.

\*The dependent variables are online identity and online behaviour, which the researchers measure throughout analysing aspects of online identity (self-disclosure, self-presentation) and online behaviour (risk-taking, communication patterns, participation in online communication).

## **3.7. Participants and Setting**

The sample chosen consists of 23 Master students of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students in different specialties. The sample varies from English to French students, Science and Technology students to Ecology students during the academic year 2023/2024.

The researchers chose participants from different specialties to create a more diverse group. This diversity helps ensure that the study considers a broader range of perspectives and experiences relevant to the research topic.

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The researchers recruited the participants through simple random sampling. Nour et al. (2022) stated that a widely utilised sampling method favours homogeneous and uniform selection. Lauren and Adam Hayes (2023) agreed that it is a selection of individuals from a larger population where every member has an identical probability of being chosen.

This sampling method was chosen because the findings can be generalised after data collection. Lakhre and Misha (2024) stated that it creates fair, well-balanced samples. These samples are then used for reliable statistical analysis, allowing us to draw accurate conclusions about entire groups.

### **3.8. Data Collection Tools**

In order to answer the research questions, the researchers rely on the following data collection tools and instruments:

#### ***3.8.1. Online Questionnaire***

According to Bhat (2023), an online questionnaire is a web-based instrument designed to gather survey data from a target audience. This instrument employs structured questions to collect information relevant to the research objectives. In this study, researchers used an online questionnaire using Google Forms as an instrument to collect data. It was administered to the sample to obtain information about students' perceptions of anonymity's impact on self-presentation and online behaviour. The questionnaire (appendix c) opened with a general instruction to introduce the research's title and purpose. It was divided into three sections preset as follows:

Section one introduced the research's topic, aim, and why participants were asked to answer the questionnaire.

Section two was divided into two parts. The first dealt with participants' background information and included four open-ended questions to collect relevant information about

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them. It dealt mainly with their gender, age, field of study, and year of study. The second part included seven questions ranging from open-ended to multiple-choice to checkboxes. It included statements that aimed to learn about the identities the participants choose to create when they are online.

Section three focused on Identity Presentation and Behavior. It included ten questions ranging from open-ended to multiple-choice about participants' self-expression and online behaviours.

It also included two statements aiming to determine the extent to which participants agree with the concept of anonymity, which allows them to explore their Identity and its forced necessity due to external factors. This section aimed to understand how participants portray themselves and behave online.

Section four contained five questions referring to the participants' perception of anonymity. It offered a combination of open-ended questions and yes/no questions.

Section four aims to understand how participants perceive the impact of anonymity on online activities and its role in the cyber world.

### **3.8.1.1. Reliability and Validity.**

To ensure the questionnaire's effectiveness, researchers focused on reliability and validity. They achieved this by using clear and concise question wording, appropriate response options, and pilot testing to enhance reliability. Additionally, well-defined questions and established scales relevant to the research topic were employed to strengthen validity.

## **3.9. The piloting of the Questionnaire**

The research process incorporates a vital preliminary stage known as the pilot study. This stage assesses the feasibility and potential effectiveness of the proposed research design

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through a small-scale, controlled evaluation. Helps researchers to identify any unforeseen challenges or areas requiring modification. By conducting a pilot study, it encompasses all elements of the research plan, including the chosen methodology, the employed research tools, and the strategies for participant engagement. The ultimate objective of the pilot study is to ensure the research design's robustness and maximise the likelihood of generating valid results during the full-scale investigation.

The selection of pilot participants necessitates a prior comprehension of the rationale underlying the piloting stage itself. This preliminary phase serves the critical function of evaluating the research instruments and procedures on a limited scale. By employing a smaller sample size, the researchers can identify and address any potential issues or impediments that might hinder the successful implementation of the full-scale study. Furthermore, the piloting stage facilitates the refinement of research instruments and procedures, thereby enhancing their validity and reliability in data collection. With an initial set of questionnaire questions, researchers assessed their acceptability through a group of the sample chosen.

### ***3.9.1. Selecting Pilot Participants***

The sample chosen is students from the Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University of different specialties. Before sharing the final version of the online questionnaire, researchers selected a few participants to test it: three students of Master 1 English in the specialty of language and communication and a teacher.

### ***3.9.2. Administering the Questionnaire***

Before sharing the online questionnaire, to enhance clarity and ease of use, the pilot participants received detailed instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. We ensured the pilot participants' understanding of the questionnaire by providing precise and concise

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instructions beforehand. Accessibility and user-friendliness were prioritised by designing the questionnaire in a format suitable for the chosen platform (Google Forms)

### ***3.9.3. Collecting Pilot Data***

At first, the online questionnaire was shared with a few participants to test it without explaining the questions. After receiving feedback from the participants, the following difficulties were identified:

- Difficulty accessing the platform without using an email
- Ambiguities in some concepts used to describe questions (Drawbacks, adhere, facets)
- The order of the questions made students lost and confused

### ***3.9.4. Assessing Response Quality***

A thorough examination of the participant's responses to each question in the online questionnaire was conducted. This analysis focused on identifying any instances of missing data, ambiguities in the wording of responses, or inconsistencies within a participant's answers. This led to the following results:

- **Missing data:** Participants avoided answering questions needing explaining using ".
- **Ambiguities:** The participants stated that some words were unfamiliar, such as disclose, authentically, perceive, and the perpetrator.

### ***3.9.5. Gathering Feedback***

After completing the online questionnaire, the participants chosen to pilot it were asked to elaborate on their experience answering it. One stated that accessing the questionnaire through the phone was challenging; however, they could access the platform when they tried through their computer. Moreover, the order of the questions was strategically adjusted to optimise the flow and participant experience.

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### ***3.9.6. Modification for the Study.***

While creating this online questionnaire, the researchers modified the wording of questions to fit the research topic, adding and removing questions to focus on the aspects most relevant to this study and adapting the instrument for a specific population group.

### ***3.9.7. Revising and Improving the Questionnaire***

After receiving feedback from the participants in the piloting stage, the following changes were made:

Questions five and six in section two were sequenced; Question five precedes Question six.

Question ten, in section two, initially stated, "Have you ever experienced online harassment?" It was revised to "Have you witnessed negative behavior online?"

Questions six in section three, students were asked to answer "why" if their answer to question five was yes. However, a need to add "why" if not as well.

Question two in the third section was a yes/no question stating if participants use their real identities on social media. It was later refined to "How does your presentation of self differ when you are anonymous online compared to when your identity is known?"

Question ten in section three was added as a follow-up to question nine based on the feedback from the piloting stage.

The pilot group helped realise that in the last section, question number two, a yes/no question that originally had a follow-up question, " If yes, how," needed another choice: " If no, why."

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### ***3.9.8. Testing Reliability and Validity***

Following the pilot test, the questionnaire was refined using valuable feedback from participants. This involved identifying and addressing any ambiguities or confusing questions through rewording for improved clarity. Additionally, redundant or irrelevant items were removed to enhance the overall focus and efficiency of the questionnaire.

These revisions aim to optimise the questionnaire's effectiveness in gathering accurate and reliable data.

### ***3.9.9. Finalising the Questionnaire***

Based on the insights from the pilot testing phase, the questionnaire underwent a comprehensive revision process informed by both participant feedback and statistical analyses. This process addressed any ambiguities identified by participants through rewording for improved clarity. Validation analyses (e.g., Cronbach's Alpha, factor analysis) were conducted to ensure the questionnaire's reliability and validity. Based on these combined insights, the questionnaire was refined to enhance its effectiveness in data collection. The final version is now prepared for full-scale data collection.

### **3.10. The procedures**

The online questionnaire was shared with students from Djilali Bounaama University Khemis Miliana using a link on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, and also through emails on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024. However, the questionnaire did not collect their emails. All the instructions were explained to the participants. Researchers invited the students to feel free while answering and giving their opinions. The respondents were asked to complete it in their free time.

### **3.11. Data Analysis Procedures**

This research used a mixed method to study the data collected from the questionnaire.

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### ***3.11.1. Quantitative Approach***

The data gathered from close-ended questions were analysed through IBM SPSS version 21. The term SPSS stands for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. It was developed by the social. Scientist Norman H . Nie and his two fellows Dale H . Bent and C . Hadlai Hull in 1968. The software was later acquired by IBM in 2009. SPSS is software programs researchers use to analyse scientific data related to the Social sciences (Williams,2024). According to the University of British Columbia, definition( n.d.), SPSS is a software program used by researchers in different fields to analyse complex Quantitative data. This study will use IBM SPSS version 21. It was chosen because of its user-friendly features and easy use in quantitative analysis. In short, it will adequately serve our purposes ( Arkellin, 2014 ). Garth and Jasrai identified two main reasons to work with SPSS: First, Garth( 2008 ) stated that the SPSS program offers both graphical representation and multiple data analysis flexibilities. At the same time, Jasrai (2020) affirmed that SPSS can manage an extensive set of data with various related variables. Koran (2012) determined an additional characteristic of the program, which, according to her, the SPSS provides the researchers with accurate numeral data such as frequencies and percentages related to the multi-choice questions.

### ***3.11.2. Qualitative Approach***

Qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. It is defined by King (2024 ) and Rice and Enzzy ( 1999 ) as a qualitative research method that researchers use to organise and systematically analyse complex data sets. It involves carefully reading and re-reading The transcripts to identify themes. Cavendish's (2011) thematic analysis is a continuous A comparative technique that entails methodologically reading and re-reading the transcribed data. Thus thematic analysis instrument is selected in the study because it enhances the validity of the analysis because of its accessibility, transparency, and flexibility. It is flexible

## **ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION**

for identifying, describing, and interpreting patterns within data sets in great detail. Indeed, the approach is appropriate for any qualitative study investigating complex research questions. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) .Braun and Clarke (2006) discussed the thematic analysis approach by proposing Six processes of the procedure :

### **3.11.2.1. Familiarisation with the Data.**

At this stage, the researchers need to familiarise themselves with their data to discover the type and number of emerging themes.

### **3.11.2.2 Generating Initial Codes.**

This stage requires the researcher to read the transcripts carefully and code all the data.

### **3.11.2.3. Searching for Themes.**

The phase of searching for themes starts with listing the codes in the data to find out the patterns (themes) across the entire data set.

### **3.11.2.4. Reviewing Themes.**

At this stage, all the themes need to be reviewed. Braun and Clarke (2006) concluded that themes must be reviewed and checked for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.

### **3.11.2.5. Defining and Naming Themes**

This phase, as argued by Braun and Clarke (2006), aims to define and identify the essence of a theme and determine what aspects of the data each theme captures.

### **3.11.2.6. Writing Report**

At this stage, the researchers should write down the report of the findings, which must convince the readers of the merit and validity of the analysis. (Braun & Clarke,2006).

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### **3.12. Ethical Considerations**

In this study, several ethical considerations were taken into account. Before collecting data and participating in the research, the participants were provided with informed consent. The paper involves key information related to the research as the title, the study's aim, and the risks and benefits of participation. The sample was asked to enter the research freely (Voluntarily) and opt out at any time. Additionally, we guaranteed throughout this research that the data gathered via online questionnaire would remain confidential and only be used for academic purposes. The respondents' personal information, including their names and ages, is not requested in the online survey and would not appear or be used in the dissertation or any element of the thesis.

Moreover, this research would not cause any physical or emotional harm to the participants. The piloting stage and testing of the validity of the research were also employed and emphasised in the research by making necessary changes in the number, the order, and the words used in the online questionnaire. Most importantly, plagiarism was avoided by clearly citing all sources of information and data we would use in the study. Notably, we assured that all our activities and actions would be free from deceit and fraud.

### **3.13. Limitations of the study**

As every research has limitations that constrain the research, This study also encountered numerous areas for improvement. The first limitation is time constraints, the main challenge facing us when conducting this study. A longer time would allow us to use various procedures and a larger sample of students from different departments at the University of Khemis Miliana. Usually, when conducting a study, it is important to have a sufficient sample size to draw valid conclusions. However, in our project, the number of participants willing to participate in the questionnaire could have been higher, hindering the ability to generalise the findings to a larger population.

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Additionally, using an online questionnaire to collect data could have been more helpful in providing accurate data and outcomes because some students faced difficulty in accessing the internet. In contrast, others may respond falsely or inaccurately to the questions (response bias). Thus, if the questionnaire was carried out with observation or interview, the results would take another dimension. The last limitation was the unavailability of data dealing with the impact of online anonymity on online identity presentation and online behaviour in the Algeria context.

### **Summary**

To conclude, the researchers provide a brief overview of the methodology used in the study, followed by presenting the research design, research variables discussion in which independent and dependent variables were examined, and the participants. Next, the data collection tools, which include the online questionnaire, were presented along with the procedures for analysing quantitative and qualitative data. The former was analysed using IBM SPSS version 21, while the qualitative data was thematically approach. The chapter ended with disclosing the ethical considerations of the research and identifying some limitations of the study.

# ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION

## Chapter Four, Results and Findings

This chapter presents the data collected from an online questionnaire devoted to Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students. Consequently, it helps to identify the potential benefits and drawbacks of anonymity and its impact on individuals' behaviours and online identity presentation. Thus, to carry out the investigation, the researchers employed a mixed method approach to collect and analyse the research data ( a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods ) in which the characteristics of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were used to examine the opinions, behaviours, and experiences of English learners towards anonymity. For this reason, students at Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University were selected as a case study and an online questionnaire was used as a tool in this study to reach the ultimate goal of the research.

### 4.1. Research Aims and Objectives

This research paper holds significant importance as it investigates and explores the impact of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behaviour. The study focuses on the Algerian university students of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana, Algeria, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of this complex relationship.

#### 4.1.1. Research Objectives

The research's main objectives are:

- To explore anonymity's potential benefits and drawbacks for online interactions and identity construction.
- To examine the impact of anonymity on various aspects of online behaviours.
- To explore the way individuals present their online identities when anonymous.

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## **4.2. Research Questions**

In order to conduct the investigation, the researchers asked the following questions aiming to solve at the end of the study:

- How does anonymity influence online behaviours and communication patterns?
- How does anonymity affect the way individuals present their online identities?
- Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?

## **4.3. Research Hypotheses**

In the light of the research questions, it is hypothesised that :

H1: Anonymity online leads individuals to misbehave.

H2: Anonymity online enables individuals to present their online identities more authentically

## **4.4. Data Description**

It sheds light on the sample chosen as well as the data collection and data analysis

### ***4.4.1. Participants Description***

Before presenting the research findings, it is appropriate to provide a detailed description of the research participants. The study sample consisted of 40 participants randomly selected as that was the most appropriate one that fit the purposes of our investigation. The participants of this research were 23 master students randomly chosen from the whole population of the study during the academic year 2023- 2024.

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The sample consists of 6 males and 17 females whose ages range from 18 to 38 from Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University who received an online questionnaire with twenty-seven (27) questions, varying from open-ended to close-ended, that aimed at exploring the learners' attitudes and views towards the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behaviour.

### ***4.4.2 . Data Collection and Analysis***

In the data collection process, the researchers opt for a mixed-method approach to reach the research aim and answer the previous research questions.

Subsequently, an online questionnaire was submitted on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024 to the Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students to gather data for an in-depth assessment and valuable information source. The questionnaire encompasses Twenty- Seven (27) questions, these latter which are of three kinds, close questions that require yes / No answers. The second type is multiple-option questions that require the respondents to select the appropriate answers from a given list of options. The third kind is open-ended questions, which ask the respondents to express their points of view freely. The questionnaire aimed to reveal the participant's views and attitudes toward the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and online behaviour. The data was divided into qualitative and quantitative; the quantitative data was analysed through an SPSS 21, while the qualitative data was analysed thematically.

### **4.5. Presentation of Results**

Data from the participants' online questionnaire was interpreted and presented through tables and figures, revealing respondents' frequency and corresponding percentages for each question.

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### 4.5.1. Section One: Background Information

The participants in this study were Djilali Bounaama University students from different specialties (random sampling) during the 2023/2024 school year; they were males and females aged between 18 to 38 years old.

#### 4.5.1.1. Gender.

The first item in this section was the participants' gender.

**Table 4.1:** Distribution of participants' gender

Response	Respondent's Number	Percentage
Male	06	26.1%
Female	17	73.9%
Total	23	100%

The results in the table above showed that females were the dominant gender of the sample; females were (17 = 73.9%) whereas males were (6 = 26.1%)

#### 4.5.1.2. Age.

The second item of this section is the participants' Age.

**Table 4.2:** Distribution of Participants' Age

Response	Respondents' Number	Percentage
18	02	8.7%
21	05	21.7%
22	06	26%
23	01	4.3%
24	05	21.7%

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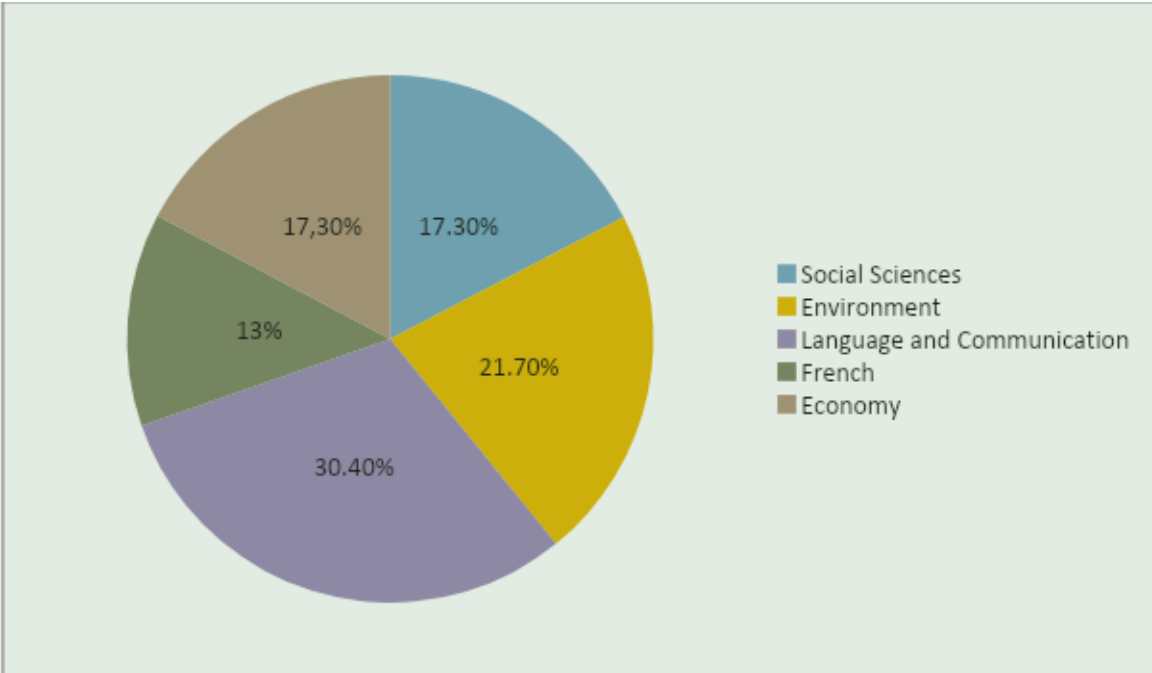
25	01	4.3%
34	01	4.3%
38	02	8.7%
<b>Total</b>	23	100%

The findings revealed that the participants in this study were aged between (18 – 38) years old.

**4.5.1.3. Field of Study.**

The third item was the participants' field of study

**Figure 4.1:** Distribution of Participants’ Field of Study



The figure above demonstrates the varied fields of study in this investigation. The fields varied from social sciences, environment, language and communication, French to economy.

**4.5.1.4. Year of Study.**

The fourth item in this section is their year of study.

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**Table 4.3:** Distribution of Participants' Year of Study

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Specialty</b>	<b>Respondents' Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Master1</b>	Social Sciences + Language and Communication+ Economy	15	65.2%
<b>Master2</b>	Environment+ French	08	34.7%
<b>Total</b>	Social sciences + Language and Communication+ Economy+ Environment+ French	23	100%

### *4.5.2. Section 2: Anonymity and Online Behavior*

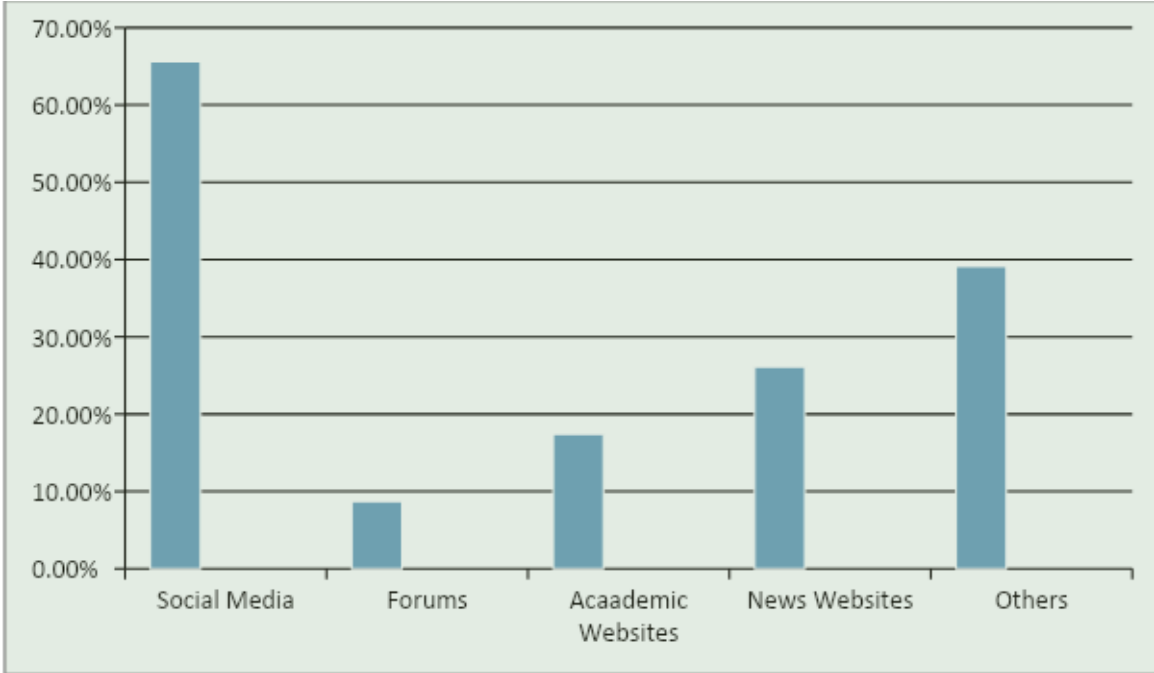
This section interprets the results related to research question 1, "How does anonymity influence online behaviors and communication patterns?".

#### **4.5.2.1. Types of Online Platforms Participants Use Anonymously.**

The first item of this section is about the types of platforms participants use anonymously online.

**Figure 4.2:** Distribution of Online Platforms When Anonymous

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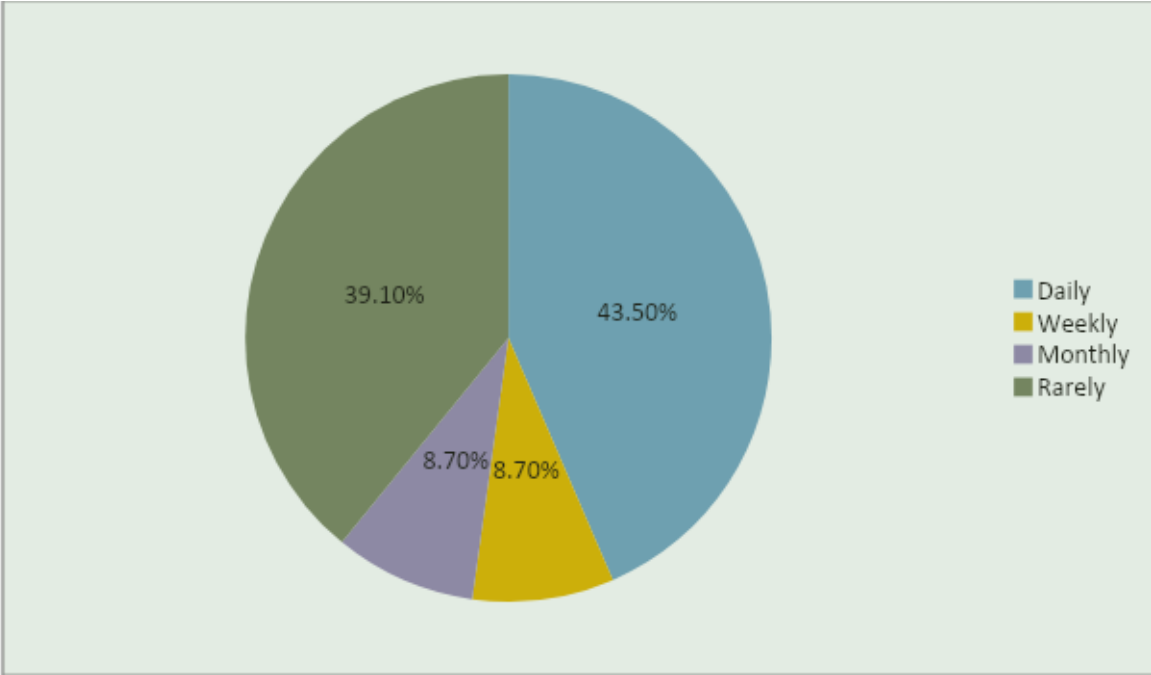
The results show that participants prefer to remain anonymous when using social media platforms ( 65.2%), 39.1% of the participants revealed using other platforms, 26.1% of the participants used news websites, 17.4% used academic ones, and only 8.7% revealed using forums when being anonymous.

**4.5.2.2. Engaging in Online Communities and Forums.**

The second item of section 2 is how often participants use online communities and forms.

**Figure 4.3:** Participants’ Regular Access to Online Communities and Forums

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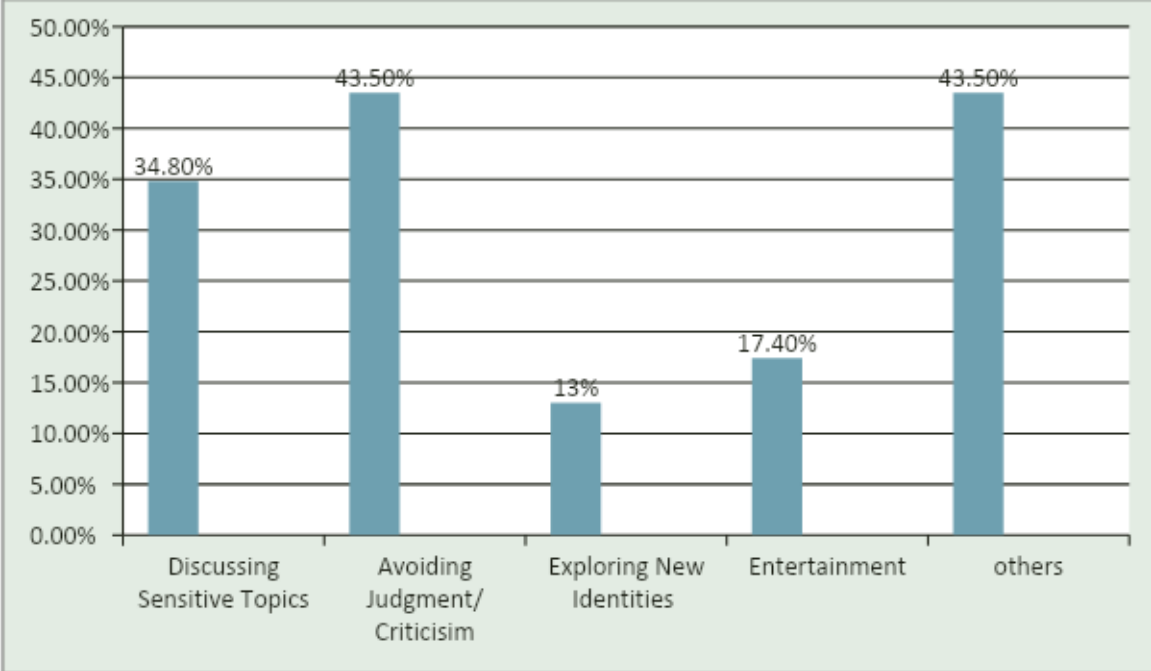


The figure above describes the participants' regular access to online platforms; it shows that participants visit online communities and forums daily most of the time.

**4.5.2.3. The Purpose of Choosing to be Anonymous Online.**

The third item is about the reasons for choosing to be anonymous online.

**Figure 4.4:** Reasons to be Anonymous Online



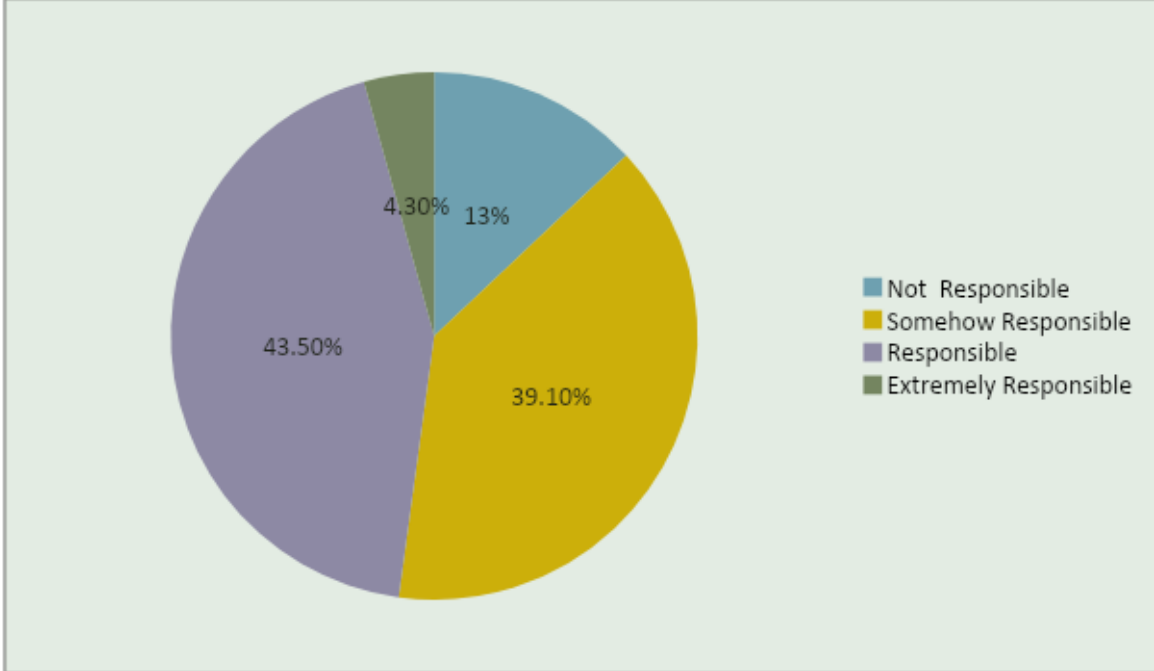
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According to the findings, the figure above illustrates that the primary purpose behind being anonymous online is to avoid judgment and criticism. Others feel the need to discuss sensitive topics (34.8%, as the figure shows). The minority revealed that entertainment and exploring new identities are their reasons to be anonymous.

**4.5.2.4. Being Responsible for Online Behaviors when Anonymous.**

This section's fourth item is how responsible participants feel for their online behaviours when anonymous.

**Figure 4.5:** Distribution of Responsibility Degrees



The findings show that the majority (43.5%) feel responsible for their behaviours when anonymous, 39.1% feel somehow responsible, and 13% do not feel responsible for their actions online. The minority feel the need to be highly responsible online (4.3%)

**4.5.2.5. Experiencing Negative Behaviors in an Anonymous Setting.**

The fifth item is whether the participants experienced or witnessed negative behaviours in anonymous settings.

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**Table 4.4:** Witnessing Negative Behaviours in an Anonymous Context

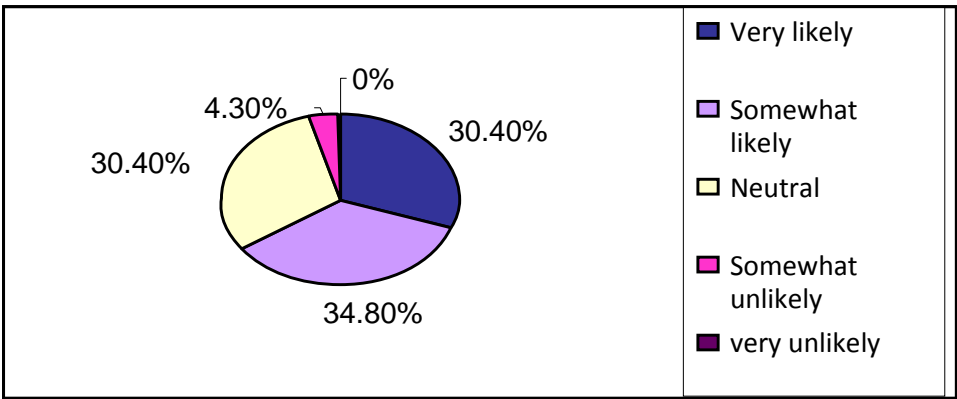
<b>Responses</b>	<b>Respondents’ Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	06	21.7%
<b>No</b>	17	78.3%
<b>Total</b>	23	100%

The results from these questions show that most participants (78.3%) did not experience negative effects in anonymous settings, while the minority (21%) witnessed negative acts in anonymous contexts.

**4.5.2.6. Participating in Online Discussions about Sensitive/ Controversial Topics When Anonymous.**

The sixth item of this section is about how likely participants are to discuss sensitive topics when anonymous.

**Figure 4.6:** Distribution of Likelihood



The figure above demonstrates that most participants discuss sensitive topics online when anonymous, while 30.4% are likely to engage in controversial topics when anonymous.

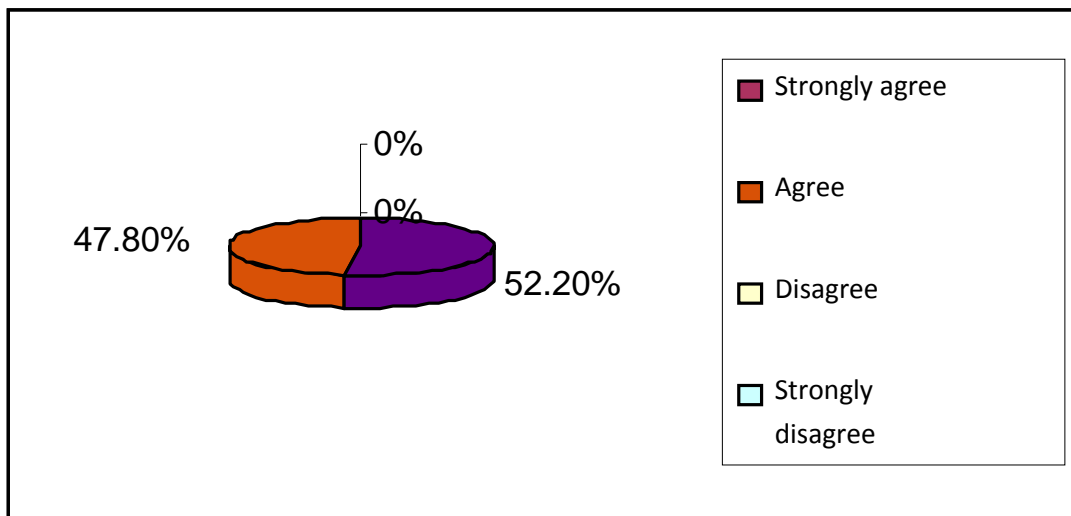
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The other 30.4% feel neutral about taking part f such discussions, and the remaining 4.3% are unlikely interested in doing so.

### 4.5.2.6. The Algerian Context is Pushing Individuals into Being Anonymous.

The seventh item was a statement declaring that the Algerian context pushes individuals into being anonymous.

**Figure 4.7:** Agreement on the Statement Above



The figure above shows that most participants strongly agree that the Algerian context is pushing people to be anonymous; 52.2% of the remaining sample agree with this.

### 4.5.2.7. The Impact of Anonymity on Online Interactions.

The eighth item in this section is about the impact of anonymity on online interactions.

**Table 4.5:** Distribution of Participants' Opinions

Responses	Participants' response	Percentage
Positive	12	52.2%
Negative	11	47.8%

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<b>Total</b>	23	100%
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The table above shows that 52.2% of the population report that anonymity positively affects online interactions, while the rest have a negative effect.

**4.3.3. Section 3: Anonymity and Identity Presentation**

This section interprets the results related to research question 2, "How does anonymity impact the way individuals present their online identities online? "

**4.3.3.1. The Use of Different Pseudonyms in Online Platforms.**

The first item of this section is about the use of pseudonyms in online platforms.

**Table 4.6:** Distribution of the Use of Pseudonyms

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Respondent’s Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	16	69.6%
<b>No</b>	07	30.4%
<b>Total</b>	23	100%

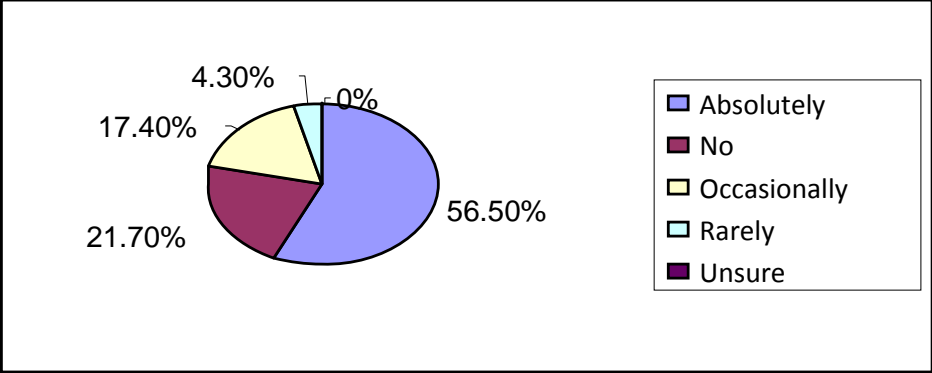
The table declares that 69.6% of the participants use pseudonyms when engaging in online platforms, whereas only 30.4% of them use their real names.

**4.5.3.2. Being Comfortable Expressing Opinions When Anonymous.**

The second item of this section is whether participants feel more comfortable expressing their opinions online when anonymous.

**Figure 4.8:** Distribution of How Comfortable Participants Feel

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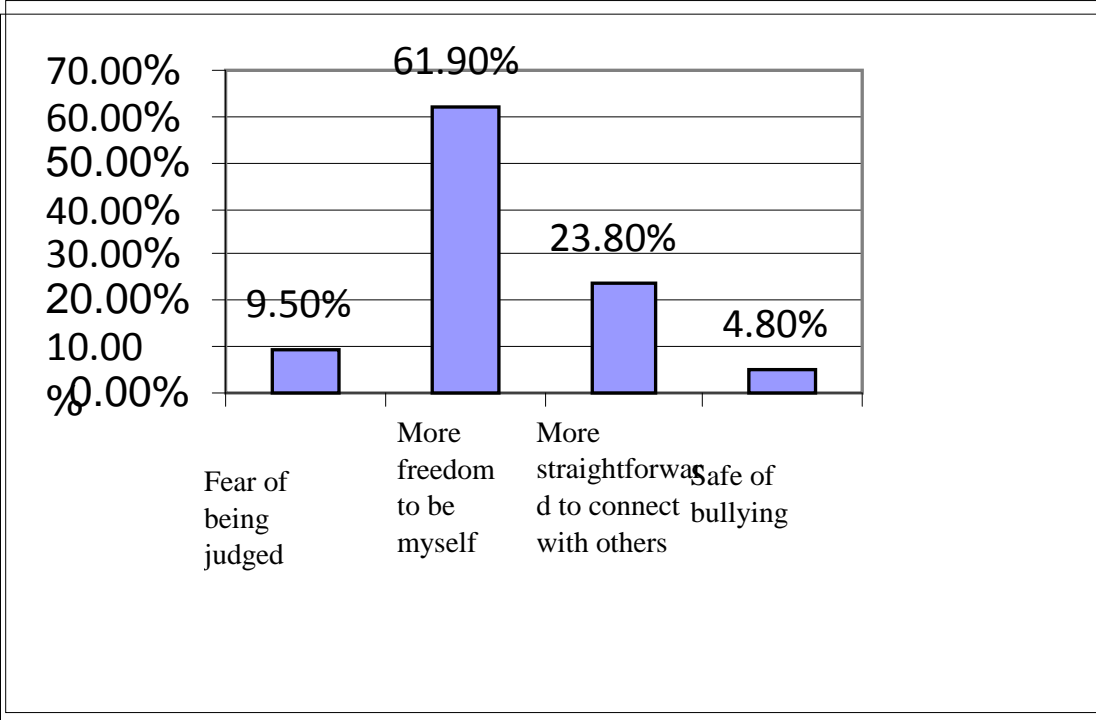
The figure above shows that 56.5% of the sample feel comfortable sharing their opinions online when anonymous, and 21.7% feel no difference between expressing their opinions anonymously or not. Whereas 17.4% declared that being anonymous gives them a sense of security when sharing their opinions online, only 4.3% find it challenging to express their opinions online, even when anonymous.

**4.5.3.3. Why Participants Feel More Comfortable Expressing Themselves Online When Anonymous.**

The third item follows up on the previous item, in which participants provide reasons for why they feel comfortable sharing their ideas online anonymously.

**Figure 4.9:** Reasons for Feeling More Comfortable Online when Anonymous

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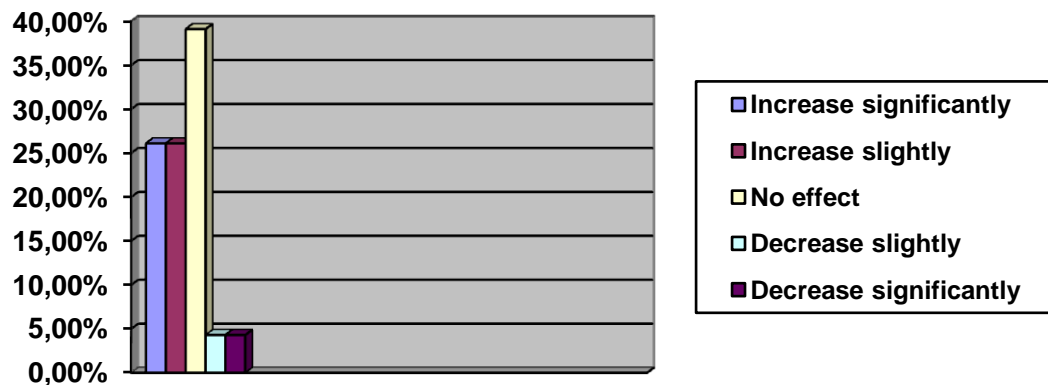
The figure above demonstrates that more than half of the sample feels more comfortable being anonymous online because they have more freedom to be themselves. At the same time, 23.80% justify that it is easier to connect with others. The minority declare that they are afraid of being judged and feel safe from bullying.

**4.5.3.4. Anonymity Effect on Confidence in Sharing Personal Experiences or Views Online.**

The fourth item is how anonymity affects the participants' confidence when sharing experiences online.

**Figure 4.10:** Distribution of the Effect of Anonymity on the Participants’ Confidence

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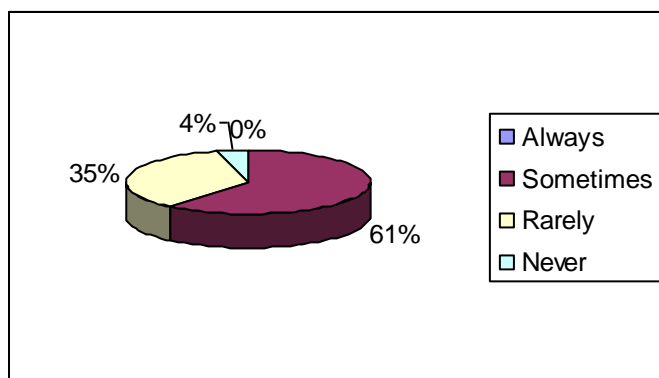


The figure above states that for the majority, being anonymous online does not affect the participants' confidence in sharing personal experiences or views online; 39.1%. The participants' confidence increases significantly and only slightly for 26.1% of the sample, whereas it decreases slightly for 4.3%.

### 4.5.3.5. Revealing Personal Information Online.

The fifth item is how often the sample shares personal information online.

**Figure 4.11:** Distribution of Participants' Rate of Sharing Personal Information Online



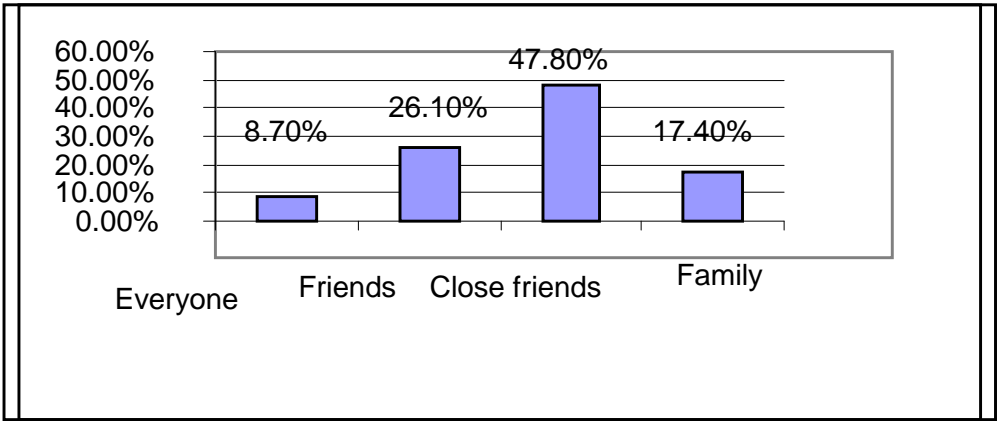
The figure above demonstrates that most people who responded to the survey sometimes disclose personal information about themselves online. Thirty-five per cent rarely reveal personal information online, 4.3 per cent never share it online, and none of the samples always share it online.

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**4.5.3.6. With Whom Participants Share Personal Information.**

The sixth item is about with whom the participants disclose their personal information

**Figure 4.12:** Distribution of Who Participants Share Personal Information with



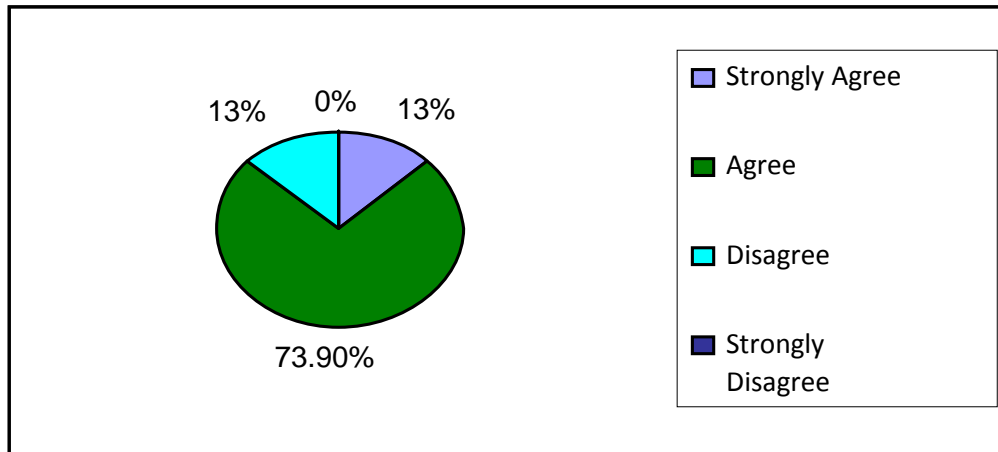
The figure above illustrates that most participants share accurate information with their close friends. While 26.1% would share their information with regular friends, not necessarily close ones, 17.40% of the sample share their identity only with family members. In contrast, only 8.7% are okay with sharing personal information publicly.

**4.5.3.7. Anonymity Online Allows me to Explore Different Facets of my Identity.**

The seventh item was a statement reporting that anonymity online allows the participants to explore different facets of their identity.

**Figure 4.13:** Agreement of Participants on the Statement Above

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The figure above shows that most participants agree that being anonymous online allows them to explore different facets of their identity, while 13% strongly agree and 13% disagree.

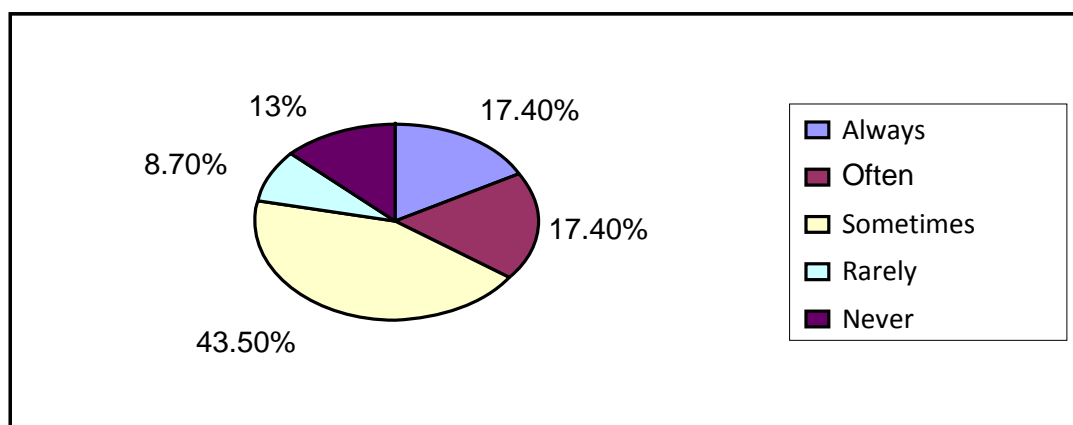
### 4.3.4. Section 4: Anonymity and Netiquette Guidelines

This section deals with results related to research question 3, "Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?"

#### 4.5.4.1. The Effect of Anonymity on Netiquette Guidelines.

The first item of the third section is about the effects of anonymity on netiquette rules.

**Figure 4.14:** Adherence to Following Netiquette Guidelines



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The figure above indicates that nearly half of the participants reported that they sometimes follow netiquette rules (43.5), while the minority state that they rarely or never tend to follow netiquette guidelines when anonymous online.

**4.5.4.2. The Ongoing Debate on Whether Stricter Regulations Govern Online Anonymous Activities.**

The second item of this section was whether more regulations should be applied to govern online anonymous activities.

**Table 4.10:** Distribution of Participants’ Agreement or Disagreement

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Participants’ number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	17	73.9%
<b>No</b>	6	26.1%
<b>Total</b>	23	100%

The table above shows that most of the sample agrees that stricter regulations should govern anonymous online activities.

**4.4. Description of Qualitative Data**

The following section analyses the qualitative data, which represented seven questions from the questionnaire. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. Jack (2019) defines thematic analysis as a qualitative method in which the researcher examines data and identifies common ideas that are repeated.

***4.4.1. Responses Describing Witnessing Negative Behaviour in Anonymous Settings.***

Analysing the most prevalent themes that rose from this theme

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### **4.4.2.1. Cyberbullying.**

This theme is evident in all three responses, with participants describing online harassment targeting appearance, possessions, and socioeconomic status. Phrases like "*bullying about shapes, faces, clothes*" and "*harsh remarks about the food*" highlight the malicious intent behind the comments. It describes a specific incident of cyberbullying targeting a person's meal picture with harsh comments about their perceived poverty.

### **4.4.2.2. Disrespectful Anonymity.**

The anonymity of online platforms emboldens negativity. The response, "*under the slogan of freedom of expression,*" suggests that some users justify their behaviour as free speech, disregarding its hurtful impact. It generalises cyberbullying beyond the specific example, mentioning attacks on appearance and clothing and using "*freedom of expression*" as a justification.

### **4.4.2.3. Prevalence of Negativity.**

One response mentions witnessing "*a lot*" of negative behaviour on Facebook, suggesting that such occurrences are frequent and may discourage users from sharing openly. Briefly confirms witnessing various instances of negative behaviour on Facebook.

## **4.4.2. Self-Presentation Online: Anonymity vs. Identity Known**

Based on the provided responses, here is a thematic analysis of how self-presentation differs online when anonymous compared to when one's identity is known:

### **4.4.2.1. Freedom and Reduced Inhibition.**

This theme captures the feeling of liberation and reduced self-consciousness associated with anonymity. Words like "*I misbehave,*" "*I feel comfortable,*" "*I feel free when I am anonymous,*" and "*No judgment*" highlight this aspect. People feel less restricted and more willing to express themselves openly.

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### **4.4.2.2. Identity Exploration and Differentiation.**

This theme reflects the use of anonymity to explore different aspects of oneself or even create an entirely new online persona. For instance, words like "*another identity*," "*different name*," "*totally different*," and "*behave as I want to be*" suggest this idea.

### **4.4.2.3. Cautiousness and Reputation Management.**

This theme highlights the increased awareness of potential consequences and the desire to maintain a particular image when one's identity is known. Words such as «*When I show my true personality, I'm more careful about what I post and engage with*," and "*When my identity is known I be more careful about my comments or sites that I should visit*" suggest this concept.

### **4.4.2.4. Consistency and No Change.**

Regardless of anonymity, a smaller group of respondents indicated no significant difference in their online presentation. Expressions like "*same thing*," "*no difference*," and "*same identity*" reflect this perspective.

## **4.4.4. Responses to Discomfort with Anonymity**

Based on the three responses, a thematic analysis reveals a potential "authenticity and self-preservation" theme. Here is a breakdown:

### **4.4.4.1. Authenticity and Self-Preservation.**

This theme suggests that the participants value authenticity in online interactions and prioritise protecting their real-life selves. Here is how each response relates to the theme:

#### **4.4.4.1.1. Difficulty to Connect with Others.**

This response implies that anonymity might hinder forming genuine connections. With some level of self-disclosure, the participant may find it easier to build trust or rapport.

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### ***4.4.4.1.2. Enable to Live a Double Life***

This response indicates a preference for consistency between online and offline identities. The participant might need help to maintain a separate persona online.

### ***4.4.4.1.3. No fear of Being Judged.***

This response suggests a comfort with vulnerability and a lack of need for anonymity to shield themselves from judgment. This could imply a preference for expressing their authentic self, even if it attracts criticism.

## ***4.4.5. Responses on Regulating Anonymous Online Activity***

This analysis explores the thematic content within the provided responses regarding regulations on anonymous online activities. Three main themes emerged:

### ***4.4.5.1. Balancing Anonymity and Accountability.***

This theme captures the tension between protecting anonymity, which allows for free expression, and ensuring accountability for online actions. Responses like "*limit the way people use social forums*" and "*implementing stricter security*" suggest a desire for some control over anonymous activity, particularly concerning serious topics or harmful content. The suggestion to "*promote tools like encryption*" acknowledges the value of privacy while advocating for mechanisms to hold individuals accountable.

### ***4.4.5.2. Combating Negativity and Protecting Users.***

This theme focuses on addressing the potential downsides of anonymity. Responses like "*anonymity can be more negative than positive*" and "*increase the power of platforms to remove harmful content*" highlight concerns about cybercrime, harassment, and the spread of misinformation. Recommending to regulate identity theft "*some regulations to the ones who steal others information*" reinforces the need to protect users from malicious activity enabled by anonymity.

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### **4.4.5.3. Conditional Regulations and Respectful Online Behavior.**

This theme reflects a nuanced approach to regulation, suggesting specific situations where anonymity limitations might be appropriate. Responses like "*especially in serious topics*" and "*not to allow some sites and Facebook pages to interact anonymously*" indicate a desire for controls in specific contexts, like discussions on sensitive topics. Proposing "*agreed rules to follow even when anonymous*" implies upholding a basic standard of respectful online behaviour, regardless of anonymity.

### **4.4.5.4. Uncertain Response.**

One response, "*I'm not really sure*", represents a neutral stance.

### **4.4.6. Responses to "Online Anonymity Regulations"**

Here is a thematic analysis of the provided responses regarding regulations on online anonymity:

#### **4.4.6.1. Anonymity and Comfort.**

*"People tend to be anonymous online to avoid social regulations and feel more comfortable."*

This response suggests that anonymity allows individuals to escape societal pressures and express themselves freely.

#### **4.4.6.2. Anonymity and Confidence.**

*"Earn more confidence"*

This concise statement implies that anonymity empowers users to participate online and potentially overcome social anxieties.

#### **4.4.6.3. The Dark Side of Anonymity.**

*"It makes people fake."*

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This response suggests a concern that anonymity facilitates deception and inauthentic online personas.

*"Online anonymity opens parallel illegal markets which boost the economy."*

This response highlights a potential negative consequence of anonymity, the facilitation of illegal activities.

### **4.4.7. Benefits of Online Anonymity**

Based on the provided responses, several key themes emerge regarding the perceived benefits of online anonymity:

#### **4.4.7.1. Freedom of Expression.**

This theme captures the most prominent aspect of online anonymity. It encompasses the freedom to share thoughts and opinions openly, *"To be free tackling any topic," "Freedom to express one's thoughts feeling and points of view. To express oneself without fear of judgment "Freedom to express your self without fear of judgement". To be more comfortable sharing thoughts "Being more comfortable to share thoughts" and to be more oneself "More freedom to be myself," "To be more me and speak without shyness".*

#### **4.4.7.2. Comfort and Security.**

This theme highlights the sense of ease and safety anonymity provides: feeling comfortable online *"Comfortable," "Be comfortable"*, protection from judgment, bullying, or harm *"Safe from any sort of hacking or bullying," "Protect your real identity from anything that can hurt it"*, and security of personal information *"Secure information"*.

#### **4.4.7.3. Connection and Exploration.**

This theme focuses on the social benefits of anonymity: the ability to connect with people more easily *"To be able to connect with people easily," "Connect with a lot of people from*

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*different countries and look to other cultures without being identified", building online connections "build connections", and exploring new communities "Personalisation of feed, exploring new different communities".*

### **4.4.7.4. Privacy.**

This theme emphasises the importance of controlling personal information online and protecting one's privacy: *"The ability to protect one's privacy," "Privacy".*

### **4.4.8. Drawbacks of Online Anonymity**

Here is a thematic analysis of the responses regarding the main drawbacks of online anonymity:

#### **4.4.8.1. Safety and Security Concerns.**

This theme dealt with cyber crimes, cyberbullying and harassment, deception and misinformation.

##### **4.4.8.1.1. Cyberbullying and Harassment.**

This theme captures the most frequent responses, highlighting concerns about online bullying, cyberbullying, and the spread of bullying behaviour when users are anonymous. Words like *"cyberbully," "harass," "blackmail,"* and *"judgment"* emphasise the fear of online abuse without the accountability of real identities.

##### **4.4.8.1.2. Deception and Misinformation**

*Spreading misinformation, online scams, and the fear of identity theft* are concerns. Anonymity is perceived to enable deceptive behaviour and the difficulty of verifying information online.

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### **4.4.8.2. Lack of Trust and Authenticity.**

This theme dealt mainly with how uncomfortable participants feel when communicating with anonymous users.

#### ***4.4.8.2.1. Uncomfortable Interactions.***

Words like "*uncomfortable*," "*unknown people*," and "*lack of trust*" highlight the discomfort users feel interacting with anonymous individuals. The feeling of not knowing the "*real you*" and *the potential for negative online behaviour* can hinder genuine interactions.

### **4.4.8.3. Impact on User Behavior.**

This theme focuses on the effect that irresponsible behaviours have on online interactions.

#### ***4.4.8.3.1. Irresponsibility and Negative Behavior.***

Several responses mention anonymity leading to *irresponsible behaviour*, *negative behaviours*, and *a lack of morals*. This suggests a concern that anonymity can embolden users to act in ways they would not otherwise.

#### ***4.4.8.3.2. Loss of Confidence.***

One response mentions *a loss of confidence between individuals*, possibly due to the potential for online negativity and the difficulty of building trust anonymously.

## **4.5. Summary of Findings**

The findings were separated and summarized as follows:

### ***4.5.1. Quantitative Data Summary***

Online anonymity, a defining feature of the digital age, presents a fascinating paradox for Algerian users. A significant portion of the population (69.6%) utilizes pseudonyms online, suggesting a preference for anonymity. This inclination is driven by the sense of liberation it fosters. Over half the participants feel more comfortable expressing opinions (56.5%) and being themselves (more than half) when anonymous. This anonymity allows for self-

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exploration and the creation of online personas distinct from one's real-life identity.

Anonymity acts as a social lubricant, facilitating connections and fostering a sense of community. Over 23% find it easier to connect with others online when anonymous, potentially due to reduced social anxieties or the ability to transcend geographical boundaries. This highlights the role of anonymity in building online communities and fostering a sense of belonging.

While embracing the freedom of anonymity, users exercise caution regarding personal information disclosure. Most participants (35%) rarely share personal details online, and close friends remain the primary recipients of such information (majority). This suggests a nuanced approach to online privacy, where anonymity allows for selective self-disclosure while maintaining a degree of personal protection. The cloak of anonymity can also harbor negativity. A concerning theme is the prevalence of cyber bullying and disrespectful behavior targeting appearance, possessions, and even socioeconomic status. This negativity discourages open sharing and creates an uncomfortable online environment. Furthermore, the lack of accountability associated with anonymity can hinder trust-building, making genuine online interactions difficult. The majority of participants (strongly agree) believe the Algerian context pushes individuals towards online anonymity. This suggests a potential underlying societal pressure that necessitates further investigation. While most agree on the need for responsible online behavior (43.5% feel responsible even when anonymous), stricter regulations are favored by the majority to combat the potential downsides of anonymity, particularly regarding sensitive topics or harmful content.

Online anonymity presents a double-edged sword for Algerian users. While it empowers individuals with freedom of expression, self-exploration, and the ability to build online communities, it also creates a breeding ground for negativity, cyberbullying, and a decline in trust. Recognizing these risks and implementing measured regulations are crucial steps

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towards fostering a safer and more positive online environment that harnesses the benefits of anonymity while mitigating its associated dangers.

### ***4.5.2. Qualitative Data Summary***

This essay delves into the key themes arising from the provided analysis, exploring the contrasting aspects of anonymity in the digital realm.

One of the most concerning themes is the prevalence of negativity associated with online anonymity. Cyberbullying flourishes in the absence of immediate consequences, with users targeting appearance, possessions, and socioeconomic status. The cloak of anonymity emboldens disrespectful behavior, often disguised under the justification of "freedom of expression." This negativity discourages open sharing and fosters a hostile online environment. Furthermore, anonymity can hinder the development of trust and genuine connections. The lack of accountability associated with hidden identities makes users wary of interacting openly, creating discomfort and hindering the formation of meaningful relationships. Despite the potential downsides, online anonymity offers undeniable advantages. It liberates users from social constraints, allowing them to express themselves freely and explore different facets of their personality without fear of judgment. This sense of freedom and reduced inhibition fosters a more comfortable online experience for many.

Moreover, anonymity empowers individuals to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, fostering a sense of community and exploration. It allows users to participate in online discussions and express opinions without the fear of social repercussions, promoting a wider range of perspectives. It highlights the ongoing debate surrounding the potential regulation of online anonymity. While the desire to preserve freedom of expression remains crucial, the need to combat the spread of negativity, cyberbullying, and misinformation necessitates a nuanced approach. Striking a balance between anonymity and

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accountability is essential, potentially involving stricter measures for specific situations like sensitive topics or harmful content.

Online anonymity presents a complex phenomenon with both positive and negative implications. While it empowers individuals with freedom of expression and exploration, it also creates a breeding ground for negativity and irresponsible behavior. Recognizing the potential drawbacks and exploring measured regulations are crucial steps towards fostering a safer and more positive online environment that embraces the benefits of anonymity while mitigating its associated risks.

### ***4.5.3. Comparison Across Different Groups***

#### **4.5.3.1. Gender.**

The participants of this study were a mix of 06 males and 17 females. Findings from the online questionnaire revealed varied answers to the questions.

##### ***4.5.3.1.1. Using Pseudonyms in Online Settings.***

03 males revealed using their names in online communities, while the others used fake names and preferred to be anonymous and unidentified.

Only 04 female participants used their real names, while the other 13 preferred pseudonyms and did not reveal their personal information, such as names.

##### ***4.5.3.1.2. Reasons to be Anonymous.***

Males reported that they prefer not to be anonymous; only 03 participants showed that they do not like sharing their personal information, such as their name. The purpose behind this is to explore new identities and discuss sensitive topics. Conversely, females reflect their

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desire to be anonymous online to avoid judgment, discuss sensitive topics, and explore new identities.

### ***4.5.3.1.3. Witnessing Some Negative Behaviours in an Anonymous Setting.***

The males in our study did not witness any negative behaviours in an anonymous setting, as 13 females reported the same results as males. Only 04 females reported witnessing evil acts in anonymous cyberspaces.

### ***4.5.3.1.4. With Whom Participants Share Their Personal Information.***

For males, personal information is sometimes revealed to friends and everyone, whereas females share what they want from personal information with only close friends and sometimes with family.

### ***4.5.3.1.5. Participants' Opinion About the Effect of Being Anonymous.***

Males believed anonymity hurts individuals' behaviours and identity presentation, while females varied their answers between positive and negative impacts in online settings.

## **4.5.3.2. Age.**

The participants of this study were males and females aged between (18 - 38)

### ***4.5.3.2.1. Using pseudonyms in Online Settings.***

Most Participants under 25 reported that they prefer to be anonymous and hide their real identities. In contrast, participants above 25 revealed that they prefer using their real names and accurate information when they are anonymous.

### ***4.5.3.2.2. Reasons to be Anonymous.***

Participants younger than 25 reported being anonymous to avoid judgment, discuss sensitive topics freely, and explore new, different identities. Participants older than 25

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reported using real names, but they show that individuals tend to be anonymous to avoid judgment or discuss sensitive topics.

### ***4.5.3.2.3. Witnessing Some Negative Behaviours in an Anonymous Setting.***

Not all the participants of this study witnessed any negative behaviours in an anonymous setting except for five participants under 25 years old, who faced these acts.

### ***4.5.3.2.4. With Whom Participants Share Their Personal Information.***

All the participants, whether under or above 25, revealed that their personal information is shared with families, friends, and close friends.

### ***4.5.3.1.5. Participants' Opinion About the Effect of Being Anonymous.***

The findings showed that participants older than 25 believed that anonymity influences individuals' behaviour in a destructive, negative manner and leads them to misbehave, while the younger than 25 varied their answers, with some believing that anonymity has positive effects and others seeing it with a negative impact.

## **Summary**

This study investigates the effects of anonymity on individuals' behaviours and identity presentation in Algeria among Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University's students. This chapter was an outline that covers the findings of this investigation. Our study revealed that participants primarily used social media platforms where anonymity is prevalent; individuals in cyberspace prefer to be anonymous, using pseudonyms to avoid judgment and criticism and discussing more sensitive topics freely; they believed that anonymity gave them the freedom to be themselves and helps them to easily connect with others. The findings reported that participants expressed a sense of responsibility for their actions when anonymously supported this by viewing that anonymity positively affects behaviors and identity presentation.

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Despite that the majority experienced behaviours in anonymous contexts, anonymity appeared to facilitate the exploration and presentation of various identities' facets. The coming chapter will be dedicated to the analytical framework of data, where the findings of this research paper will be deeply analysed and interpreted by the existing theories and prior research.

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## **Chapter Five, Discussion of Results**

The previous chapter was dedicated to presenting the results of this investigation; the findings painted a comprehensive picture of how anonymity can influence online behaviours and identity presentation; anonymity online empowers users to be more open in their self-expression, exploring different facets of their identities and being more selective about what information they share online since they tend to reveal personal information only with close friends. The findings showed that anonymity creates a sense of responsibility and confidence in sharing personal experiences online, presenting an authentic identity without the fear of judgment and bullying. This chapter will discuss and analyse those findings about the existing theories and prior studies to answer the research questions.

### **5.1. Research Aim and Objectives**

This research paper holds significant importance as it investigates and explores the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behaviour. The study focuses on the Algerian university students of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana, Algeria, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of this complex relationship.

#### ***5.1.1. Research Objectives***

The research's main objectives are:

- To explore anonymity's potential benefits and drawbacks for online interactions and identity construction.
- To examine the effect of anonymity on various aspects of online behaviours.
- To explore the way individuals present their online identities when anonymous.

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## **5.2. Research Questions**

In order to conduct the investigation, the researchers asked the following questions aiming to solve at the end of the study:

- How does anonymity influence online behaviours and communication patterns?
- How does anonymity affect the way individuals present their online identities?
- Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?

## **5.3. Research Hypotheses**

In the light of the research questions, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Anonymity online leads individuals to misbehave.

H2: Anonymity online enables individuals to present their online identities more authentically

## **5.4. Research Methodology**

This study investigates and explores the effect of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behaviour in Algeria. Both qualitative and quantitative design methods are used. The quantitative one is common in educational research, and it involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting the required data (Creswell, 2012) using an online questionnaire.

A qualitative one uses thematic analysis to study the perception of anonymity and its impact on masked identities in the Algerian context.

## **5.5. Discussion of Key Findings**

This section presents the key results and draws insights from both the statistical and qualitative data to illuminate the effect of anonymity on online interactions, identity presentation and netiquette rules as per the research questions.

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### ***5.5.1. Analysis of Findings Related to the First Research Question***

"How does anonymity influence online behaviours and communication patterns?"

The first question explores how anonymity influences online behaviours and communication patterns. By examining users' experiences and reported behaviour changes, researchers can gain valuable insights into anonymity's potential benefits and drawbacks in online interactions.

The analysis of how anonymity influences online behaviours reveals a spectrum of effects. Participants agreed that anonymity online tends to have a positive effect rather than a negative one. Anonymity acts as a shield against judgment and criticism, increasing self-expression. Individuals often prefer to be anonymous on social media platforms to express themselves more freely and confidently, discussing sensitive topics and engaging in conversations they may find intimidating without anonymity. Furthermore, anonymity reduces inhibitions, allowing for more authentic self-expression and potentially leading to a broader range of voices being heard online. However, according to the participants, the Algerian context significantly pushes them to be anonymous online. 73.9% of the participants reported that they disclose their personal information with their friends, mostly their close ones, rather than family members. Therefore, it is clear that one of their reasons for being anonymous is to avoid family pressure and being identified and judged by them.

According to the sample's findings, anonymity positively affects online behaviours. The majority (12 participants) agreed that individuals prefer being anonymous rather than being identified to express themselves more freely and confidently in discussing sensitive topics without fearing being judged, evaluated, or criticised. Additionally, anonymity facilitates building relationships with others by easily connecting with them. Moreover, it helps protect one's true identity and safety from identity theft and hackers. However, the minority believes

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online anonymity can have potential drawbacks to how people behave in cyberspace. Hiding one's true identity makes them deal with unknown people, making them uncomfortable sharing their experiences, thoughts, ideas, and opinions online. The lack of accountability can lead to irresponsible behaviour. Some users would not engage in face-to-face interaction like cyberbullying and using rude, aggressive language without respecting others.

The qualitative data paints a more complex picture. While anonymity empowers some users and fosters participation, concerns about negativity also emerge. Participants reported a prevalence of disrespectful behaviour and cyberbullying online. Additionally, some users expressed discomfort with anonymity, valuing authenticity and finding it more challenging to connect with others in anonymous settings.

### ***5.5.2. Analysis of Findings Related to Research Question Two***

“How does anonymity effect the way individuals present their online identities?”

The research question above explores how anonymity, the ability to be unknown online, influences how people choose to present themselves. By analysing user experiences and perceptions, the research aims to reveal how anonymity shapes online identity presentation.

This analysis presents the way anonymity affects identity presentation online. According to the participants of this study, anonymity significantly influences how people present themselves online. It can create a space for greater freedom of expression, exploration of different online personas presenting varied facets of their identity, and reduced anxiety about judgment. Individuals feel a sense of responsibility for their actions even when anonymous; they reported that their self-presentation differs when they are in face-to-face interaction compared to online interaction, feeling more comfortable expressing themselves online, knowing they will not be evaluated as harshly.

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Users are selective about what personal information they reveal online, with most opting for occasional or minimal disclosure, mostly with friends and close friends rather than families. This suggests a personal performance for sharing personal details within a trusted circle. The findings showed that for many users, anonymity online can be a valuable tool for exploring different facets of their identity. It can create a space where they feel freer to experiment with self-expression and discover new aspects of themselves. The sample tested agreed that they use different pseudonyms for different platforms, mainly social media platforms. The findings showed that being anonymous online and hiding one's true identity may positively affect identity presentation.

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses offered a deeper look into how anonymity impacts online identity presentation. Some users described a sense of liberation and reduced inhibition when anonymous, exemplified by quotes like "I misbehave" or "I feel free when I am anonymous." This anonymity allows them to explore different facets of themselves online, adopting "different names" and behaving in ways they might not otherwise. Some prioritise caution and reputation management, expressing more carefulness about their online comments "when my identity is known," which aligns with quotes highlighting a desire to protect their real-life selves. Interestingly, some users reported no significant change in their online persona despite anonymity, suggesting a consistent online identity. These contrasting perspectives showcase the multifaceted impact of anonymity on online identity presentation.

### ***5.5.3. Analysis of Findings Related to Research Question Three***

"Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?"

The research question above explores whether anonymity encourages or discourages individuals from following netiquette guidelines. The findings reveal a complex relationship between the two. While a significant portion (78.3%) of the population reported following

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netiquette guidelines even when anonymous, a minority (12.7%) admitted to rarely or never following them. This suggests a potential decrease in adherence compared to non-anonymous settings. Further supporting this notion is the strong agreement (73.9%) on the need for stricter regulations governing online anonymous activities.

Thematic analysis sheds light on user perspectives regarding achieving this balance between anonymity and accountability. Some users advocate for "balancing anonymity and accountability" through stricter security measures and promoting encryption tools. This suggests a desire to maintain some level of anonymity while ensuring users are held responsible for their online actions. Others prioritise "combating negativity and protecting users," suggesting more robust content moderation and regulations against information theft. This highlights concerns about the potential misuse of anonymity for harmful purposes. The concept of "conditional regulations" emerges. Some users advocate for limitations on anonymity on specific platforms, where the potential for negativity might be higher. Others propose "agreed rules to follow even when anonymous," suggesting a universal standard of online etiquette regardless of anonymity.

These contrasting perspectives showcase the complexity of the issue. While some users see anonymity as incompatible with responsible online behaviour, others believe it can be balanced with safeguards to create a safer and more respectful online environment.

### **5.6. Theoretical Implications**

The results obtained from this investigation will be interpreted by previous studies, which will determine how these findings contribute to or challenge the existing theories.

The social identity model of deindividuation (SIDE) theory proposes that anonymity reduces self-awareness, leading to disinhibited behaviours and a greater likelihood of acting rudely or aggressively. This disinhibition is thought to occur because individuals lose the self-

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consciousness associated with being identifiable. Zimbardo's study supported this theory by believing that when individuals are unidentified they feel not responsible and misbehave. This research paper's results contradict this theory; the findings showed that individuals prefer to be anonymous a lot, and this increases their self-awareness and helps them to explore themselves freely and show kindness; participants revealed having a sense of responsibility even when being anonymous. One of the critical results of this study is the effect of the cultural context on anonymity behaviours; participants strongly agreed that the Algerian context pushes people to be anonymous; the fear of others' reactions toward one opinion and the fear of being socially evaluated, judged or criticised leads individuals to prefer being anonymous rather than being socially identified. One prefers to reveal personal information with close friends rather than family. Here, we can recognise the effect of the Algerian context on individuals' behaviours when using online platforms.

The present study's findings partially contradict this theory. The SIDE theory proposes that anonymity reduces social identity salience and can lead to disinhibited behaviours. However, while expressing a sense of freedom under anonymity, our participants also reported a feeling of responsibility. Algerian participants might utilise anonymity for self-exploration within online communities that foster a sense of responsibility despite anonymity.

This study is similar to the Zimbardo study in that both explore anonymity and behaviour; both experiments investigate how anonymity influences participants' behaviours.

This study's results focus on anonymity's positive influence on self-expression and online identity exploration. In contrast, Zimbardo's experiment results investigate how anonymity impacts obedience to authority and the potential for increased aggression. Furthermore, our research explores anonymity in online environments where social interaction differs from

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face-to-face settings. His study uses laboratory settings with a pre-determined role for participants and a fabricated victim, creating a highly artificial situation.

The present study's findings suggested that anonymity can positively affect self-exploration and online identity presentation in which participants feel secure and more comfortable expressing themselves online when being anonymous. This contrasts with Zimbardo's study (1969) classic shock investigation, where anonymity facilitated increased obedience to authority and even aggression in a laboratory setting. Our research presents that the reduced social pressure and freedom of online self-presentation might create a space for positive identity exploration. In contrast, Zimbardo's experiment created a particular situation where anonymity combined with other factors contributed to negative behaviour and negative identity presentation.

Suler (2004) developed the online disinhibition effect, which believed that individuals act differently than they do in real-life situations; people in cyberspace do or say things they would not normally do in face-to-face settings, expressing themselves more freely. According to him, there are two dimensions to this theory: benign disinhibition reflects the positive side of anonymity; it is when individuals are motivated to share personal information about themselves more freely and keep engaging in helping others, and toxic disinhibition reflects the negative side of being anonymous; it is when individuals act rudely, aggressively and manners.

Our results contradict the toxic dimension by reflecting the negative aspect of anonymity. However, they align with the second dimension, "benign disinhibition." Participants reported feeling more comfortable expressing themselves, their thoughts, ideas, and opinions and exploring different facets of their identities when anonymous. According to

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our participants, anonymity facilitates self-expression and identity exploration, which is what the benign disinhibition dimension of the theory believed.

Suler's theory proposes that anonymity online can lead to disinhibition, which can manifest in both positive and negative ways; our research's findings directly support the concept of benign disinhibition by demonstrating how anonymity enables individuals to explore themselves more freely, including increased self-disclosure, expression of shyness or unpopular opinions, and expression of various facets of their identities online. However, this theory views social interaction as a theatrical performance. Individuals act as performers on a stage, managing their impressions and presentations for an audience. Goffman proposes concepts like the front stage, the public presentation of self, carefully created for the audience and the backstage, the private realm, where individuals can relax and be themselves.

Our findings directly align with this theory; this research paper revealed that anonymity allows participants to avoid being judged or criticised, hiding their real identities and removing the pressure of maintaining a specific front-stage persona; participants might feel freer to express themselves authentically. Participants reported feeling more comfortable expressing themselves and exploring various identities under anonymity; this suggests that anonymity might create a space for individuals to experiment with different "backstage" selves online, potentially leading to a more multifaceted authentic online identity presentation. One of the key findings was that participants feel responsible for their actions when being anonymous. The dramaturgical theory does not directly address this concept but could be interpreted as a form of internalised social norm. Even without a physical audience, participants might have an internalised sense of appropriate behaviour within the online communities they frequent.

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The social identity theory focuses on and explains how individuals derive a sense of self from group memberships. Anonymity online might reduce the salience of a participant's social identity online; this aligns with the SIT's prediction that under anonymity, individuals might prioritise their identity over their group identity, but taking into consideration that anonymity might not wholly erase social identity salience, participants might still identify with online communities they frequent even when being anonymous. The results showed that hiding one identity increases a sense of freedom and comfort ability, aligning with what SIT believed. However, this theory primarily focuses on group membership and intergroup relations; this investigation needs to explicitly explore how anonymity affects group dynamics or intergroup behaviour on social media.

Christopherson's study (2006) directly and strongly aligns with our results. Individuals can be fully anonymous online but still express their thoughts and opinions without fear of being judged or socially evaluated. This allows them to take or present a different positive perspective on their acts and identities and change their behaviours for the better by showing kindness and helping others.

Both results found that social media is used as the primary platform for anonymous interactions; the results of this investigation showed that anonymity increases self-disclosure, particularly regarding sensitive topics; it suggested that when one is anonymous, he can better explore various facets of their identity, presenting themselves differently than in real life situations in a more authentic way, these findings aligned with Christopherson's study in 2006. However, despite the alignment between Kimberly's study and this investigation's results, there are some differences; this study's findings highlighted some key points that Kimberly did not mention in his investigation, for instance, the sense of responsibility that participants feel when being anonymous, also highlighting the Algerian context as a factor influencing online behaviors online. In addition, Kimberly's study targets primarily the positive effects of

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being anonymous on online behaviors and interactions, while our study also reasons to be anonymous and why participants tend to hide their identities in addition to just presenting the effect of being anonymous.

Barlett's study (2006) highlights the potential for anonymity to facilitate negative behaviours under certain conditions; his study found that perceived anonymity online increased the likelihood of participants reporting cyberbullying behaviour and holding positive attitudes toward it. This research paper's findings contradict Barlett's study on one side and align with it on a different side. In contrast, Christopher's study presents the negative aspect of anonymity in cyberspace by leading individuals to cyberbully others and misbehave when anonymously; our study reveals the positive aspect of being anonymous and how it affects behaviours positively by giving them a chance and the freedom to be themselves and present themselves more authentically. However, according to our participants' opinion, cyberbullying is one of the famous behaviours caused by online anonymity. When individuals are anonymous, they keep engaging in cyberbullying behaviours, thus aligning with what Barlett found in his study.

Morhan-Martin and Schumacher (2003) believed that online anonymity leads individuals to respect netiquette guidelines, fostering positive social behaviours and empowering online connections and interaction. This study aligns with this investigation's finding; participants tend to follow a set of netiquette rules online and shape positive behaviors and interactions.

According to Yan and Tan (2012), being anonymous online allows individuals to explore different facets of their identities, presenting themselves differently than in face-to-face settings in an authentic view. This research paper presented the same results as this study and aligned with it; participants tend to present an authentic identity, exploring different personas where they show kindness and help others behave positively and respectfully. These findings

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directly contradict this investigation's results; individuals use respectful language and express themselves freely without fearing being judged or criticised, respecting others and presenting themselves in a more positive image.

### **5.7. Practical Implications**

This analysis of anonymity's influence on online behaviour offers valuable insights for practical applications. The findings highlight anonymity's potential to empower open self-expression, exploration of identity, and selective information sharing. It can also foster a sense of responsibility and confidence in sharing personal experiences, leading to more authentic online interactions. Online platforms can design features that enable anonymous participation in sensitive discussions or create tiered systems where anonymity allows essential interaction to leverage these benefits. However, verification is required for advanced features. Moderation strategies can be refined to address negativity while acknowledging the positive aspects of anonymity.

Furthermore, a focus on user education regarding responsible online behaviour, both anonymous and identifiable, can contribute to a safer environment. Real-world applications extend beyond general platforms. Mental health platforms can utilise anonymity to provide safe spaces for sharing, while creative expression platforms can offer anonymous options for users hesitant to share work under their real names. Ultimately, recognising the influence of anonymity and implementing these strategies requires a nuanced approach that balances the benefits of anonymity with the need for accountability and a safe online environment, which will be an ongoing process as online behaviour and technology evolve.

### **Summary**

This chapter was dedicated to analysing and discussing the results gathered from the online questionnaire to answer the research questions and test this study's hypotheses about the effect

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of anonymity on behaviours and identity presentation when being online. To reach this aim, an online questionnaire was used to gather data, and responses were analysed using SPSS for quantitative data analysis and thematic analysis for qualitative data analysis. The findings revealed that anonymity online positively affects individuals' behaviours where they feel comfortable, responsible and confident in sharing their thoughts and ideas online, being anonymous, and expressing themselves more freely and openly without the fear of being socially evaluated. When hiding his/her identity, one better explore new facets of their identity, protecting his/her true real identity, following and respecting a set of netiquette guidelines. The results of this investigation contradict and oppose the first hypothesis in this research paper, which is "anonymity online leads individuals to misbehave"; the findings showed that one tends to behave respectfully with others. However, these results confirmed the second hypothesis, "anonymity online enables individuals to presents their online identities more authentically"; participants reported expressing themselves more freely without fear of being socially judged or criticised, presenting an authentic view of their identities and exploring different new personas.

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## **Chapter six, Conclusion**

This concluding chapter is dedicated to summarize the investigation and brings together its key ideas and highlights the key findings. It presents a reminder of the research' aim, research questions, objectives and hypotheses, briefly answering the research questions along with a short summary of the findings gathered. In addition to the limitations which faced the researchers during this study's investigation. This chapter also presents some recommendations for future research and how the study contributes to the specific field. A short summary is presented as well as the appendices.

### **6.1. Research Aim and Objectives**

This research paper investigates and explores the effects of anonymity on individuals' behaviour and identity presentation in Algeria among Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students. This study's main objectives are:

- To explore anonymity's potential benefits and drawbacks for online interactions and identity construction.
- To examine the impact of anonymity on various aspects of online behaviors.
- To explore the way individuals present their identities when anonymous.

### **6.2. Research Questions**

In order to conduct the investigation, the researchers asked the following questions aiming to solve at the end of the study:

- How does anonymity influence online behaviors and communication patterns?
- How does anonymity affect the way individuals present their online identities?
- Does anonymity online encourage or discourage individuals from fostering netiquette rules?

### **6.3. Research Hypotheses**

In the light of the research questions, it is hypothesized that:

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H1: Anonymity online leads individuals to misbehave.

H2: Anonymity online enable individuals to present their online identities more authentically.

### **6.4. Summary of Findings**

The main aim of this study is to investigate and explore the effect of anonymity on individuals' behaviour and identity presentation in Algeria among Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students. A mixed-method approach was used to collect data easily via an online questionnaire and analyzed throughout using SPSS 21 for quantitative data and a thematic analysis for the qualitative data.

The findings oppose the first hypothesis which proposed that anonymity leads individuals to misbehave online and confirm the second one suggesting that a person explore an authentic identity when being anonymous; the study revealed that anonymity has a positive effect on ones' behavior, participants prefer to hide their real identity and use different pseudonyms for different platforms to express themselves more openly and freely without the fear of being judged or socially evaluated and criticized. Anonymity increase individuals' self-confidence and their comfort ability in discussing sensitive topics exploring different new identities and sharing their thoughts and experiences more freely. As well as exploring different facets of their identities easily connecting with others and building relationships.

The results showed that participants used to share and disclose their personal information like age and name and so on only with friends and mostly with close friends rather than families. Therefore, one of the main reasons to be anonymous is to avoid family's pressure and being judged by them and that suggests the effect of the Algerian context in pushing individuals to hide their real personas and present other one where they explore themselves freely as they want without the fear of being socially evaluated and judged or cyber bully by others. The findings revealed also that participant under anonymity they respect and follow a

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set of netiquette guidelines when interacting with others and representing a positive standards of behaviors toward others.

### **6.5. Limitations**

As with many studies, this research paper was conducted under limitations that should be considered when interpreting its results.

A time constraint limited the study's ability to delve deeper into the intervention's effects and provide a more comprehensive analysis. If the intervention had taken place over a longer period of time, there may have been a greater gain to the study.

The sample size was not sufficient to draw a valid conclusion; participants willing to take a part in the online questionnaire were limited which did not allow for having more results and insights having an online questionnaire was not that helpful to gain a lot of results because some participants faced a difficulty in accessing the internet; others faced difficulty to open the questionnaire and answer it because email address is important and some participants had a problem in their emails so they were unable to fill the questionnaire.

While using SPSS version 21 as a tool to analyze researchers faced some problems due to the unavailability of SPSS analysis users, finding workers in analyzing data through SPSS in English wasn't possible, thus data was translated to Arabic in order to be analyzed

The limited research timeframe may not have captured the full spectrum of how anonymity influences online behaviour and identity presentation over time. A longer study period could have revealed deeper or more nuanced effects.

The relatively small sample size might limit the generalisability of the findings to the wider Algerian population. A larger, more representative sample could provide more conclusive results.

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### **6.6. Recommendations for Future Research**

This study investigates the effects of online anonymity on online behaviour and identity presentation among Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana University students. This study recommends new interesting future studies in different areas. While this study provides a snapshot, future researches could benefit from longitudinal designs that track participants' online behaviour and identity presentation over time. This can reveal how anonymity's effects evolve or change over extended periods. and As this research covers various Algerian online platforms, coming studies could delve deeper by focusing on one specific platforms popular among Algerians like social media platforms, this allows for a more nuanced understanding of how anonymity influences behaviour and identity within those specific online communities.

New studies may tackle demographic factors; by exploring how anonymity's effects differ based on demographic factors like age, gender or location within Algeria, this can reveal variations in how people from different backgrounds utilize anonymity online.

Comparative studies can be done about examining how anonymity affects online behaviours and identity presentation in Algeria compared to other countries with different cultural norms to gain broader perspective.

Since anonymity can have both positive and negative aspects, future researches could explore the ethical considerations surrounding online anonymity in Algeria. This might involve investigating potential risks associated with anonymity and how to promote responsible online behaviours.

### **6.7. Contribution**

This study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of anonymity's influence on online behaviors, particularly within the Algerian context. It contributes to the field of online anonymity research by revealing nuanced relationships between anonymity and user

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behaviors. While the findings confirm that anonymity empowers some users to express themselves more freely, particularly on sensitive topics, they also suggest a sense of responsibility persists even when anonymous. This is evident in the cautious approach to disclosing personal information and the continued adherence to netiquette guidelines reported by participants. Interestingly, despite not experiencing significant negativity themselves, the desire for stricter regulations on anonymous online activity highlights a broader societal concern about potential misuse.

This enriched understanding of anonymity's complex role goes beyond simply empowering free expression. It emphasizes user concerns about privacy, online safety, and potential negative interaction. These findings call for further exploration of cultural variation in how anonymity shapes online interactions.

### **Summary**

This concluding chapter provided an overview to the study's findings. It starts with a reminder about the research's aim, questions, objectives and hypotheses. Also, a short summary of the findings as well as limitations faced by the researchers in conducting this investigation. This chapter covers as well some recommendations for future research and how this study contributes to the field of study

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Participant Information Sheet

Department of Foreign Languages,

University of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana

**Research title:** The Impact of Anonymity on Online Identity Presentation and Individual Behavior in Algeria

**Researchers:** khedda Nassima, Cherrani Wissem, kouider Moussaoui Fethia.

**Students' Level:** Master 2 in Language and Communication

Dear participants, you are invited to participate in the research project below

#### **What is the research about?**

In the digital marketplace of ideas and interactions, the veil of anonymity grants users unique freedom and acts as a shield, allowing individuals to explore facets of their identity that might otherwise remain hidden. However, its influence extends beyond mere self-expression. It can also alter how individuals behave online. Without the fear of social repercussions, some may engage in online behaviours they would not dare undertake physically. This can range from playful banter to more concerning instances of cyberbullying and hate spreading. This information sheet explores how anonymity shapes online identity presentation, influences individual behaviour, and presents opportunities and challenges for Algerian society.

## **ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION**

This study aims to investigate and explore the impact of anonymity on online identity presentation and individual behavior in Algeria.

Intriguingly, research examining the Algerian context appears limited, with minimal findings even on academic platforms like Google Scholar. This lack of knowledge underscores the need for further investigation into anonymity's unique role in shaping online behaviour and fostering a safe, ethical digital environment for Algerians.

### **Who is undertaking the research?**

Khedda Nassima, Cherrani Wissem and Kouider Moussaoui Fethia are conducting the research.

### **Your Contribution Matters!**

We are seeking enthusiastic participants to help us delve into the multifaceted effects of anonymity; this study examines its influence on online behaviour, identity construction, and presentation.

. Your involvement will primarily involve filling up a questionnaire

### **Here is how you can contribute:**

We would love to hear your honest opinions and experiences. This will help us achieve our goals

Your hands-on participation is crucial in order to find definite results.

Your feedback is invaluable. We encourage you to be as honest and expressive as possible

Your time and insights are greatly appreciated.

## **ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION**

### **Please note that:**

-Participation is entirely voluntary and you have the right to refuse at any point without consequence.

-Even after agreeing to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason.

-Data will be collected through an online questionnaire, stored in a safe place and used only for academic purposes.

-We assure you that your personal information and responses will be confidential.

-Your participation in this research will be completely anonymous; we will not ask for your name, email address, phone number, or any other personal details that could be used to identify you.

*"Thank you for considering participating in this research. Your contribution is invaluable to helping us research our goal. We appreciate your time and willingness to share your thoughts and experiences."*

# ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION

## Appendix B

### Consent Form for Participants

Department of Foreign Languages,

University of Djilali Bounaama Khemis Miliana

**Title of Research Project:** The Effect of Anonymity on Online Identity

Presentation and Individual Behavior in Algeria

**Names of Researchers:** Khedda Nassima, Cherrani Wissaem, Kouider

Moussaoui Fethia

Please draw a (✓) at the end of every sentence

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the Above research project, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at Any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative Consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymized responses.
4. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

## **ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION**

5. I agree that the data collected from me to be used in future research.
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of participant: kacimi Alaeddine

Signature:

Name of researcher: Cherrani Wissem

Signature

Date: March 25, 2024

*Copies:*

*Once both parties have signed this, the participants should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet, and any other written information provided to them. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents, which must be kept in a secure location*

**Appendix C**

**The Online Questionnaire**

# **Anonymity, Online Identity and Behaviour**

We greatly appreciate your participation in this study, which aims to

understand the impact of anonymity on online behaviours and identity among university students. Your valuable insights will contribute to a better understanding of

how anonymity impacts how we present ourselves and behave online and its impact on university students. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with us. Your feedback is vital in shaping our research efforts. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. Your responses are confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed.

## **Part one: "Demographic information" and "Online Identity"**

In this section, we would like to know a bit about the identities you create for yourself online. This could include usernames, avatars, profiles you create on social media platforms, online forums, or gaming platforms.

1. Gender:\*

Male

Female

2. Age:\*

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3. Field of study/work:\*

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4. Year of study/work:\*

## ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION

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5. What types of online platforms do you use anonymously? (Select all that \* apply)

Social media

Forums

Academic websites

News websites

Others

7. How often do you engage in online communities and forums?\*

Daily

Weekly

Monthly Rarely

8. Do you use different usernames or nicknames for different online platforms?

Yes

No

8. For what purposes do you choose to be anonymous online? (Select all that apply)

•Discussing sensitive topics

•Avoiding judgment/criticism

•Exploring new identities

•Entertainment

•Others

9. How responsible do you feel for your online behaviours when anonymous?\*

## ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION

Not responsible at all   somehow responsible   responsible   extremely responsible

10. Have you ever witnessed or experienced negative behavior (e.g., cyberbullying) in anonymous settings? \*

Yes

No

11. If yes, please describe:

---

### Part three: "Identity Presentation and behaviour":

This section focuses on how you choose to portray yourself online as well as how you choose to behave. Think about the information you share, the way you communicate, and the overall image you project on different platforms.

1. How does your presentation of self differ when you are anonymous online compared to when your identity is known? \*

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2. Do you feel more comfortable expressing your opinions online when anonymous?

Absolutely, anonymity makes it easier for me to express my opinions online.

No, I feel equally comfortable expressing my opinions online whether anonymous or not.

Occasionally, anonymity gives me a sense of security to share my opinions online.

Rarely, I find it challenging to express my opinions online even when anonymous.

Unsure/Prefer not to say.

## ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION

3. How does anonymity affect your confidence in sharing personal experiences \* or views online?

- Increases significantly
- Increases slightly
- No effect
- Decreases slightly
- Decreases significantly

4. How likely are you to participate in online discussions on sensitive or \* controversial topics when anonymous?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

5. Do you feel more comfortable expressing yourself online when anonymous?

- Yes
- No

6. If yes, why?

- Fear of being judged
- More freedom to be myself
- Easier to connect with others
- Other :

## ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION

7.If no,why?

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8.Does anonymity encourage you to adhere to netiquette (online etiquette) rules?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9.How often do you disclose (reveal /show)personal information about yourself\*  
online?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

10.With whom do you share your personal informations online?\*

- Everyone
- Friends
- close friends
- family
- Other :

---

## ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION

Rate your agreement on the following statement: "Anonymity online allows me \* to explore different facets of my identity"

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Rate your agreement on the following statement: "The Algerian context is \* pushing individuals into being anonymous"

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

### Part four: "Perception Of Anonymity"

1. Do you believe that Anonymity has a positive or negative impact on online interactions? \*

Positive

Negative

2. Should there be more regulations of anonymous activities online? \*

Yes

No

**ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY PRESENTATION**

3. If yes, How?

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4. If no, why?

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5. What do you perceive as the primary benefit of being anonymous online?\*

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**ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY  
PRESENTATION**

6. What do you perceive as the main drawback (disadvantages) of being anonymous online? \*

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**ANONYMITY'S EFFECT ON ONLINE BEHAVIOR AND IDENTITY  
PRESENTATION**