



Digital Bulletin – Anonymous Apps - YOLO

Anonymous apps are not a new thing in social media. Sarahah was popular for a short while enabling people to add comments to other social media sites without providing any username or means of identification. But why are developers creating apps where identity is concealed and what are the potential risks or benefits?

Why are there anonymous apps?

This type of app is very popular with children and is often used as a source of validation. It's nice to receive an anonymous comment that you looked nice today or that you are appreciated. The developers of these apps believe that "anonymity can unlock super good behaviours" (*Gregoire Henrion – developer of YOLO*). The intention is that it is a platform for positive and affirming comments without feeling embarrassed or awkward.

YOLO

YOLO is a new app that is incredibly popular among teens. Just a week after its release, it became the most downloaded iPhone app in the U.S. It is a free add-on feature for Snapchat. When users connect YOLO to their accounts, they can add a sticker to their Snapchat Story that invites their followers to give them feedback or ask them questions anonymously. Then, if they choose, the users can respond to those questions in their Stories. Think of it as an anonymous comment box about your life.

What are the risks?

As you might imagine, not all of the comments are like the one featured in YOLO's sample screenshot: "You look so cute! What's your secret?" Some reviewers have said the social media app "is full of bullying" and "has started so much drama." Anonymous apps are also "notorious hubs for cyberbullying," according to Common Sense Media. Just about all of the major ones have closed down after being overwhelmed by instances of inappropriate use. Josh Ochs, the founder of digital safety resource Safe Smart Social, has said these types of apps "can bring out the worst in some tweens and teens" and that they're, as a rule, "not good for human nature".

People have also raised concerns about privacy. YOLO's terms of service state that the app may "collect and store personal information" including your name, phone number, email address, password, photo or avatar and location, though this is standard language. Online safety group Protect Young Eyes believes that YOLO's age rating is too low at 12+, writing in a review, "Do you know many 12-year-olds who consistently make great decisions over the long haul without accountability? Neither do we."

Support

YOLO warns users that if they send inappropriate or harassing messages, their identities will be revealed, but reviewers who've received these types of messages claim this just does not happen. Instead, if a comment is reported for being inappropriate, it simply disappears.

Snap (the company that owns Snapchat) say that YOLO is "not owned by or affiliated with Snap in any way. According to Snap, YOLO operates on "Snap Kit" and therefore still has to follow Snap's Community Guidelines, even though it is not affiliated with Snap. This means users can report bullying or intimidation on YOLO through Snapchat reporting tools.

If there are any topics that you would like more information about, or if you have any concerns regarding online safety, please feel free to contact me.