

Self-Presentation of Individuals on Social Networking Websites: A Comparative Study of Personal and Virtual Identities of Youth in Lahore, Pakistan

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Abstract

Main purpose of the study was to explore the involvement of youth of Lahore city with virtual identities by using technique of survey as tool of data collection. The study targeted youth having age group between 18 to 24 years both males and females. The findings of the study showed that majority of female respondents in age group 21-24 are fascinated with virtual world. Statistical test chi-square was applied for testing the hypothesis. The results establish that one's personality in terms of the individuality, personal traits; interaction with real friends is being affected.

Keywords: Virtual identity, Survey, Youth, Chi-square, Personality, Individuality, Personal traits, Interaction.

Introduction

This study “Self-Presentation of Individuals on Social Networking Websites: A Comparative study of Personal and Virtual Identities of Youth in Lahore Pakistan” explores how a person’s own identity is being influenced by technology created online identity as it is generally observed that technology plays a vital role in human lives. Internet is one of the creations of technology and today the internet is regarded as the prime information base and it has become a fundamental part of our lives. Defining the use of internet Dryburgh, H. (2001) describes the habit of internet that it is used to get knowledge about most up-to-date events in the world, along with some updates regarding wellbeing associated activities. While talking about the Communication technology in particular, it has drastically altered a society’s working and functioning. With innovations in communication being developed constantly, people are becoming quicker in their different proceedings. Expansion of social networking websites has boosted the tremendous growth in communication technology (Ahmed & Jabeen, 2011). These websites allow people to make their complete profiles and communicate with the rest of the world. Present research has also made an attempt to add knowledge in this regard and mainly aimed to investigate the way people use these websites and present themselves especially Pakistani youth, in a comparative study of personal and virtual identity.

Social networking websites offer a channel to consumers in order to communicate their selves away from individual characteristics, tags, exchange views, talk about interests, and convince one another in a particular group (Pugh, 2010). However, with the emergence of internet in 1995, it has become accepted in people’s

homes, a thing called online identity (virtual identity) has been formed. Jenson & Gilly (2003) stated that online identity allows you to change your identity and pretend to be someone or something you're not in reality.

SNWs function like an online community of internet consumers. Individuals are able to create a virtual identity by using social networking sites such as Face book, Twitter, MySpace etc. They set up a profile by using a different names and age. They also use a completely different photo and pretend to be what they are not in order to make their online friends comment or like their status. By getting positive response, users alter their reality thus leads to distortion of one's self and self crisis. By making real lives secret, users feel satisfaction.

Most flourishing and leading social networking website is Facebook which has interesting features. Reviewing the history of "Face book", "Mark Zuckerberg" granted investment to it. Then during 2003, he recognized a page "Facemash". The supervision department stopped the website it was seriously fined to "Zuckerberg" due to confidentiality matters. After compensating money, "Facebook" became well-known once more in "Feb 2004". Present study has been conducted in order to discover the "Self-Presentation of individuals on social networking websites in a comparative study of personal and virtual identities of Youth in Pakistan" hence, aimed to explore that how an individual is influenced by Social Networking Websites and how the personal identities of youth is being replaced by the internet based virtual identities. Social media networks have the ability or power to shape and alter our personal identities.

With the boom of latest technology, the social media networks provide facilities to users with which they can edit and change their actuality in the eyes of their online friends. They put stress on personal individual's positive attributes and downplay negative ones. Rochelle H. Emert stated that "our identities are also shaped by the types and qualities of our relationships to other people, especially the feedback they give us about our identity." Suler (2004) in article titled Identity Management in Cyberspace claimed that a misrepresentation of one's self or consequent help of people may influence a person's conception about individuality, which can directly lead to personality disaster.

Researcher has chosen this area of research after observing that Pakistani youth is highly attracted towards virtual communication via social networking sites. According to PTA (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority) 2010 report, surfing of internet has been rapidly increased in Pakistani community. In fact, not only in Pakistan but all over the world, increased usage of internet can be explored through results of many studies. This rate is getting higher via wireless net facilities and cellular phone apps. "Internet Service Providers Association of Pakistan (ISPAK)", told that the expected "internet users have reached 25 million in the country".

The researcher observed that people, especially, young generation is more inclined towards digital world and forgetting their real life attributes. In researcher's opinion, people are pretending just to be accepted in their online world. They are lagging behind their self identities what they really are. By updating their status online, they are actually exploiting their own individuality. Wiszniewski and Coyne (2004) pointed "whenever an individual interacts in a social sphere they portray a mask of their identity". According to the

researcher's point of view, the online identity basically interferes with the personal lives of individuals. They are always pretending to be someone or fake something about themselves just for the sake of acceptance and getting positive response from their online contacts.

This research will reveal that how our personal self is being affected by artificial created online identities. How our individuality is disappearing with the growth of the technological advancement. It seems that we are damaging our real personalities and converting ourselves into a digital world just for being a part of the online world and communities.

Theoretical Framework

A good theory helps predict what will happen in future by giving practical insight into how the phenomenon being studied works. Following are the two theories employed by the researchers to support this research and its stance. The first theory, "uses and gratifications" given by Blumler and Katz(1974) is applicable to the present study as it supports researcher's stance that people use variety of media to satisfy their specific needs and meanwhile formulate one's identity through social networking. Users use different social networking sites to maintain and seek out their personal status according to the choice of their online friends. This research seeks understanding that how users of virtual media present themselves to their online friends and changes their real life identities. Individuals do change their real identities and portray themselves what they are not in actual, because they somewhat try to fulfill their cognitive, affective, personal, social

integrative, tension release and other needs as discussed by uses and gratifications.

The second theory Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs explains specifically three needs which are safety needs, social needs and self-esteem that are interlinked with this present study. Every human being in this world wants acknowledgment in the form of acceptance, reputation or fame and position (status). These kinds of needs fall under Maslow's self-esteem needs which people try to obtain by SNWs. Because at this platform, they are free to do anything they want or to become recognized by the rest of that online community.(Mc Leod,2007)

Literature Review

Literature review presents the review of previous studies which have been conducted by various researchers in different time periods on the issue which the present researcher is going to conduct research. It helps the researcher to get information how much studies have been done on that issue and which techniques and methodologies were used by previous researchers. So it can be said review of literature is very helpful for researcher. This literature review is intended to present various national and international studies conducted in the past.

Ishfaq Ahmed and S Jabeen (2011) stated in his study how usage of social networking sites affected the educational routine and habits of students. A sample size of 1,000 students was chosen from different universities of Pakistan by using simple random technique. Tool of data collection was survey. The results showed that usage of SNS significantly affects the academic performance

of students but if students manage their time effectively they can take benefits from these sites and can use information by these sites for study purposes. Furthermore, teachers and parents should monitor students while being online.

Soraj Hongladarom (2011,pp533-548) stated in his study titled as *Personal Identity and the Self in the Online and Offline World* that with the emergence of technology advancements like social networking websites, it has become very difficult to understand a personal self on line and offline. A person has different accounts on these sites, for example in one account he shows himself a serious professional and in another account he is totally different. The researcher argues that because of the amalgamation between virtual and personal identity, both online and offline identities are being automatically constructed. Due to external factors, personal identity is shaped by external environment, community and society in which one person lives. Online personality is shaped by online environment comments, photos and profiles. The researcher concluded that our personality is being effected by technologies and we cannot identify difference between online and offline identity.

Cabiria evaluate individuals' online practices with their real practices being "gay or lesbian" persons. Results of study reveal that "The structure and design of virtual worlds allow its users to freely explore many facets of their personalities in ways that are not easily available to them in real life". The cause of that liberty may be privacy which online communication provides. Internet technology gives people facility to escape from societal values and many other issues which they have to face in actual life. John Suler (2004) described that on internet individuals react deeply and

habitually while in real life they are not like this. The research indicates 6 aspects which are correlated in generating various impacts due to usage of net “dissociative anonymity, invisibility, synchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of authority”. The study concluded that people pretend their selves on net in a way which they are not actual but help them to become a part of that online community.

Numerous works have been done all over the world to identify the effects of social networking websites on internet customers and according to the findings there are both merits and demerits of SNWs on its users. Suhail and Bargees explained that users of SNWs have been found to encompass a lot of mental and emotional distractions. Cassidy states “youngsters make competition with each other on the basis of their internet friends”. According to Baroness Greenfield the sufferers (users) of internet technology feel like always being online and never are offline and this directs towards lesser competence.

Deborah L. Wise (n.d) explored how identity is formed and how society’s association and actions influence our identity and when we enter in virtual spaces how they influence our identity. Formation of identity in virtual world is a psychological procedure consisted of three features tools, action, and links. Individuals change their identities according to their online communities.

After having gone through the available literature, the researchers have observed that broad research is being done in the world on effects of social media networks on its users. In Pakistan, this was a relatively new topic and only very few academic institutions have conducted studies on issues of social networking sites. Therefore,

with reference to Pakistan this was the first comprehensive study which aims at “influence of social media networks on one’s self”.

Research Methodology

Central objective of this study is to identify the comparison between personal and virtual identities of youth. As youth attempts to hide their exact profile i.e. name, age and gender etc to become the part of virtual communities. Present research was conducted in order to find out youth’s involvement with virtual identities and to explore the reasons why these websites are so appealing among youth.

The research was carried out during September 2012-13. In order to collect the data the researcher adopted two ways or techniques of survey i.e. questionnaire and scheduled interviews to collect the required data from its population. In this study there is application of “purposive sampling method” for assembling statistics. This sampling method is used when you have an exact rationale in your mind then you start this whole course of research.

The researchers have chosen Lahore city as a universe for collection of data. In Lahore, we have selected four universities as a population for this study and the sample size from the population consisted of 400 young students of famous universities. The included universities are University of Punjab, Government College University, Lahore College for Women University and Forman Christian College University. The researchers wanted to equalize sample on the basis of gender, hence, 200 males and 200 females were selected as a sample from the above mentioned institutions. For interviews the sample size from the population was 30 intense young online users who were interviewed. To

equalize the gender 15 females and 15 males were selected from the above mentioned institutions as a sample for interviews. The researchers have chosen the sample from the universities because of the availability of maximum youth having age bracket 18 to 24 under one roof.

To conduct the survey and scheduled interviews close ended questionnaire was designed consisting of 26 questions and 13 open-ended questions respectively according to the objectives and the research questions of present study. The reliability of questionnaire was 0.742 by applying “Cronbach’s alpha” which indicates high consistency among items of variables. Results of Cronbach’s alpha are presented below.

Table 1 **Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.742	26

After checking reliability and finalizing the questionnaire the researchers went to field for data collection. Furthermore, statistical package for social studies “SPSS” 15.0 was used for statistical application. Statistical tests such as descriptive statistics, chi square, and independent sample t-test was used for data examination. Descriptive statistics were used for graphical presentation; chi-square test was used to check the association between dependent and independent variables and Independent sample T-test was used to check whether the mean score of males and females with respect to influence of online social networking on personal identities is significantly different or not.

Findings

This study was targeted to evaluate the effects of online social networking on youth's personal identities. Youth selected for the study were between 18 – 24 years of age. Sample data has been analyzed separately to examine each hypothesis. As the study discovered the association between the involvement with social networking and affect in self identities of youth, therefore statistical test Chi-Square was used.

The outcome of Chi-Square for each hypothesis is summarized in the following section.

Hypothesis 1

H0 Online social networking is not a hindrance for youth to make self- identities.

H1 Online social networking creates hindrance for youth to make self -identities.

Table 2 shows Chi-Square value that null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. Therefore, an alternative hypothesis of significant association between online social networking and its effects on youth's self- identities is proved.

Table 2

Chi-Square(a)	Df	P-Value	Conclusion
32.885	2	.000	Significant
Total	400		

Table 3 shows the group statistics, revealed that female youngsters are more inclined towards virtual world in contrast to males. As a

result they are more under the impact of social networks as compared to male youngsters.

Group Statistics

Table 3

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total	Male	20 0	55.8650	9.22563	.65235
	Female	20 0	60.2400	9.82267	.69457

The responses were composed from two different groups, males and females. So the statistics used for measurement were independent sample T-test. The test has been applied at a confidence level of 95%. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of both groups' male and females. This table shows the sample size, mean, standard deviation and standard error of mean. The higher mean value for females implies that in Lahore, Pakistan females are more influenced by social networking websites as compared to males.

Table 4 shows the significance (2-tailed) value of both variances is less than 0.05 so it can be said on the basis of calculated results females are affected more than males by online social networking.

Table 4 **Independent Samples Test**

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Upper	Lower
Gender	Equal variances assumed	1.050	.306	-4.591	398	.000	-4.37500	.95288	6.24831	-2.50169
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.591	396.445	.000	-4.37500	.95288	6.24834	-2.50166

Hypothesis 2

H0 Virtual identities do not influence self identities of youth.

H1 Virtual identities influence self identities of youth.

Chi-Square value in the Table 5 shows that null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance. Therefore, an alternative hypothesis of significant association between virtual identities and its influence on self identities of youth is accepted.

Table 5

Chi-Square(a)	Df	P-Value	Conclusion
48.860	2	.000	Significant
Total	400		

Table 6 shows the overall results of Chi-Square that are significant. Mostly in social sciences Chi-square analysis is used to check the association between variables. Hence, in this study the chi-square results are significant; there is level of association between the two variables.

Table 6

	Chi-Square(a)	Df	P-Value	Conclusion
	295.895	50	.000	Significant
	Total	400		

Discussion and Analysis

Social networking websites are a part of modern technology as created by the internet. Present research has made an effort to contribute knowledge regarding presentation of individuals on social networking websites. Besides this, particular attention was paid to comparison between personal and virtual identities of youth with reference to their usage of SNWs. Appropriate methodology was used to accomplish the study and further the results. The current study's foundation and verification is done through former experimenters all over globe. So, social networking leave effect over personal or self- identities' users i.e. June Ahn (2011), Ishfaq Ahmed (2011), *Evers, Albury, Byron (2013)*

The study targeted youth having age range between 18 to 24 years included both male and females. To check the influence of online social networking among the two of genders, 400 young boys and girls of the stated genders responded to the survey. Whereas 30 respondents answered to the scheduled Interviews in detail. The famous city has chosen as study's universe in which researcher has selected four universities that is Punjab University, Government University, and Lahore College Women University along with

Forman Christian College University. The research was carried out during September 2012-13. Survey and scheduled meetings were used to gather required information. Questionnaire and checklist for both methods were made as a tool for data collection. Overall results of Chi-Square are significant. There is association between social networking and personal identities of individuals. Online social networking creates hindrance for youth to make self identities and consequently virtual identities influence self identities of youth. The results are supported with reference to literature review which proves that all the social forums play pivotal role in both sides like transferring new amendments in daily tasks in supplementary while affecting habitual values of individuals the most important are young persons.

The data examined clearly illustrates the relationship linking online social networking and self identities of youth. The study also found results from independent sample T-test that SNWs have more impact on females than males so on the basis of results, it can be said that females in Pakistan have less recreational activities rather than males. Like males, they cannot easily approach the outer world and are confined to homes. In this scenario, they use social networking as an easy way of entertainment and communication with friends. Similarly, Kraut explained it may occur on the cost decrease in well-built relations and community surroundings which may bring isolation and sadness. He further added that group of people on internet construct originate on the base of modern technologies that motivate individuals “presentation of self to be a performance”.

The finding also revealed that particular age group among youth that is more inclined towards online social networking is 21-24.

This group is mature enough to judge right from wrong. Most of these students are university going and some of them are employed. So it can be said on the basis of data that to get rid of their routine life tensions or worries they just log in to these sites and relax themselves. According to the majority of responses youngsters use it to escape from their everyday lives. As supported by previous studies, Fred Stutzman stated that individuals build contacts and relationships with other people through social networking websites and they disclose different types of information regarding themselves on these sites, information about self, information that they are present on these sites, information that what they like and dislike. All these aspects have vital descriptive influence.

Present study into which researcher selected 18-24 age group as a sample also supported by a study done by Khizra Zaheer (2013) in which she explored such age numbers in the context who use “facebook” in abundance fall under 18-24 years of age. It also revealed from the findings of the present study that the majority of respondents use facebook among all other websites. It revealed that facebook due to its friendly features is the most popular social networking website among youth in Lahore, Pakistan. Not only in Pakistan but in others countries too, facebook is the most preferred and most used website as confirmed by a previous study Alex Quan (2012) that more than half of the community in Australia are users of facebook and this fact is exposed by their own checking committees as well as they spend much of their valuable time on it and this is going to be very alarming in near future (Sperti 2011). According to the findings, majority, of the respondents use SNWs just for the sake of fun, enjoyment and time pass.

The results are supported by previous researches conducted by several renowned and top class researchers like Acord Dasgupta & David (2004) which demonstrate that these virtual groups or systems are a hindrance in the self identities of youth. It diminishes association of a person to his atmosphere. Hence, merely a danger towards simple lives and creates in their hearts a quest for knowing more and more things which can be negative.

This study makes stronger “Blumler and Katz’s Uses and Gratification”(1974) again and again telling us receivers are major factors in its selection, choice and consumption. As it “regards audience as active media users as opposed to passive receivers of information”. The “Uses and Gratification Theory” search for – “individuals use media to gratify their needs”. The researcher has also the same viewpoint that youth uses certain media i.e. social networking websites to gratify their social and psychological needs to make their self identities. The theory investigates the individual’s dream seeking and a quest for escape from their routine lives. Similarly, this point of theory relates and strengthens the researcher’s stance whenever Pakistani youth gets tense, then they go online and chat with their friends to relax admitting “Uses and Gratifications Theory”, Pakistani youth encompass their own motivation and choices to use media to gratify their certain needs.

The study is also supported by Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs theory (Mc Leod,2007). Every human being in this world wants acknowledgment and acceptance, reputation or fame and position (status). These kind of needs fall under Maslow’s self-esteem needs which people try to obtain by SNWs. Because in this platform they are free to do anything they want or to become recognized by the rest of that online community.

Cassidy states “youngsters make competition with each other on the basis of their internet friends”. Similarly, Dr Himat Tall ends the ongoing debate and said that adults or teenagers make internet as one of their important part and this thing is ruining them disappointingly.

Conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to explore the involvement of youth with virtual identities in Pakistan. Therefore, the study calculates youth’s consumption behavior of SNWs i.e. duration of having social networking account, time spent on it, reasons of using SNWs, preferred social networking site, influence over self-identity and role played by it. It also evaluates the association between the above factors with demographic characteristics i.e. age, gender, institution and command over languages.

The hypotheses of the study were “online social networking creates hindrance for youth to make self- identities” and “Virtual identities influence the self- identities of youth”. In the light of the findings and results, it was proved that SNWs create hindrance to make self- identities and have the power to shape the personal identities of youth. It was also discovered that females are more inclined towards virtual world as compared to male users. The conclusion was supported by previous researches as most of the studies observed that virtual identities shape one’s real personality. The researchers have applied “Uses and Gratifications” and “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs” approaches to support this study. To analyze the youth’s involvement with social networking, their reasons to use social networking all comes under Katz Theory of uses and gratifications and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs that

people consider themselves as an active member of society and they can have the full choice to use media in order to satisfy and gratify their certain psychological needs.

Two methods of survey were used to collect data for the study. One was questionnaire which was quantitative in nature and the other was scheduled interviews which was qualitative in nature. Due to time and financial problems, the researchers just confined to Lahore only. The population for the study were both males and females aged 18-24. The researchers also applied the purposive sampling technique to reach the population. The sample size consisted 430 and questionnaire was used for both methods as a tool for data collection.

The Statistical package for social studies (SPSS) version (15.0) was used to evaluate the data. Chi-square statistical test was applied in order to analyze association between online social networking and self- identities of youth. T-test was used to compare the males and females uses of SNWs.

According to the general findings, it revealed that majority of the respondents' use social networking for interaction with their friends, enjoyment and for the sake of fun. It indicated that youth has no alternative other than SNWs for enjoyment and communication. It also revealed that most favorite and preferred social networking website by majority of respondents is Facebook due to its attractive content or features. Majority of the respondents were aged 21-24 who are frequent users of SNWs. In Pakistan, this group is mature enough to judge their right from wrong. Most of these students are university going and some of them are employed. So it can be said on the basis of data that to get rid of

their routine life tensions or worries they just log in to these sites and relax themselves. According to the majority of responses, youngsters use it to escape from their everyday lives. So, the results clearly show that this group is more fascinated towards virtual world as compared to age group of 18-20.

An unexpected finding came out that out of 430 respondents; females as compared to males are more inclined towards virtual world. Because generally it is said that males are more prone to these kind of stuff. SNWs have more impact on females than males. So, on the basis of results it can be said that females in Pakistan have less recreational activities rather than males. Like them, they cannot easily approach the outer world and are just confined or restricted at homes and in this scenario; they use social networking as an easy way of entertainment and communication with friends.

The first hypothesis tested was online social networking creates hindrance for youth to make self-identities. Analyzed through chi-square test there is significant association between online social networking and self- identities. Hence, social networking websites do create hindrance in development of personal identities (individuality, personal attributes, life-style, real life interactions etc), behavioral characteristics. The second hypothesis tested was virtual identities influence the self- identities of youth. Chi-square value shows the again significant association between virtual and self -identities of youth. Therefore, in the light of major findings it concluded that with the passage of time youth is attracted towards SNWs and of course is becoming habitual of it. This study declared that this association is altering the personalities and of

course can affect the life style of youth between the ages of 18-24 in the city of Lahore, Pakistan.

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Appendix 1**Table A: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents
(Survey questionnaire)**

Sr #	Demographic Characteristics of respondents	Description of Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	200	50%
		Female	200	50%
	Total		400	100.0
2	Age	18-20	184	46%
		21-24	216	54%
	Total		400	100.0
3	Institutions	PU	75 M-50 F	18.75%----12.5%
		GC	75 M-50 F	18.75----12.5%
		FC	50 M- 50 F	12.5%----12.5%
		LC	50 F	12.5%
	Total		400	100.0
4	Command over languages	Urdu	176	44%
		English	161	40.3%
		Punjabi	63	15.8%
	Total		400	100.0