

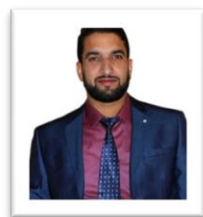
# Social Media and Virtual Identity

## A Study of Internet Negotiation in Kashmir

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### Abstract

The interplay between media and its audiences creates a wide spectrum of inferences and perceptions to understand the self and the world at large from an entirely new perspective. All forms of media that we use and are available in a society, bring forth information and knowledge that we analyze and interpret, whether consciously or inadvertently. But in contemporary times technological advancement has altogether altered the whole scenario. Multimedia information platforms implicitly as well as explicitly influences every aspect of life. At the psychological level, peoples' outlook, perception, attitudes, behaviour e.tal have undergone a metamorphosis due to ICT becoming an inseparable component. The very concept of individual and social identity is altered as virtual identities are negotiated and real-time ones are camouflaged for various reasons

This study tries to assess how individual identity is changed from social to a virtual one and its engagement therein. The paper lays stress on the fact how online media is changing the social-cultural identity with changing patterns of socialization and social interaction among media users viz a viz social media. The researcher will try to explore how cross-sectional population-based in Kashmir region use and access the internet keeping in views the various socio-cultural identities. It further assesses how a virtual identity is built with the usage of social networking sites in the new media age. To achieve the objectives of the study structured interviews schedule has been made use of by the researcher for data collection.

**Keywords:** Virtual Identity, ICT, New Media Age, SNS, Media Users, Kashmir.

### Introduction

Social media and its associated platforms allow internet users to interact with each other, sharing details about their personal and professional lives in multiple ways. Social media demonstrates debate around issues challenging dominant social attitudes and social-cultural and economic issues. These debates and interactions take new dimensions and directions in a socially mediated form shaped by the various platforms and voices. Usage of social media changed the approach to communication, information of individual's identity, lifestyle, interest and experiences. The availability of multiple social media platforms has resulted in the transformation of the way of life of people irrespective of age, gender, caste etc. In the digital era. Through social media usage, a person can interact with millions of people present online, using unlimited space on the Internet to satisfy his communication with users, the mass that uses social media. Hence communities of interest are formed and are connected by shared news, views, perspectives and analyses.

Social media on one hand offers opportunities for the construction and articulation of the identity of individual and groups. While on the other these platforms devote extraordinary importance to users, giving importance to identity, reputation and relationships between people. For example in the case of Facebook and Twitter dissemination and sharing of information take place while on YouTube posting of video take place. Hence it can be argued that we have to treat blogs Twitter and others platforms not in isolation but as part of an ever-evolving media sphere. While there are many and topical apps serving differently/specific purposes the force is on those popular social media with myriad functions. In social

media, there is also the concept of public. Publics are social spaces created by the reflexive circulation of discourses (Warner, 2002) while publics are self-organized spaces formed between strangers and featuring personal and impersonal discourses and there are also often transient topically specific issues publics (Dahlgren, 2009) while Burns and Burgers (2011, 2015) argue that public on social media, whether pre-defined or ad-hoc reflect the convergence of different groups of different groups these spaces within.

Authors like January H. Kietzmann, Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy and Bruno S. Silvestre in an article published in 2011, presented the framework that defines social media using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, distribution, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. The presentations of identity on social media and the documentation of experiences is a contested Process. This can be articulated by means of socialization and social interaction. This has a role to play in the building of online identities.

This paper aims to explore how individuals through the use of social media platforms create a virtual identity. In this context, the study tries to assess how individual identity is changed from social into virtual one and its engagement therein. The paper lays stress on the fact how online media is changing the social-cultural identity with changing patterns of socialization and social interaction among media users viz a viz social media. The papers address the problem of online or we can say virtual identity by focusing on creating an identity with the usage of social networking sites in the new media age.

### **New Media Sphere**

New media is the most widely used mass media in today's time. It has swept the audiences of other media as it possesses numerous benefits over traditional and other mainstream media like television, radio and print. A convergent medium –the Internet provides text, images, graphics, audio, and video and possesses the quality of providing instant feedback. Besides, unlike other media, the internet is not region-centric. It provides an expansive view of all the happenings in the world. Another feature that it possesses is of being in expensive and easily accessible. Internet is a simple tool that requires few skills to access. In the era of globalisation, when numerous services are used to reach the largest number of people, the Internet is being employed in almost all spheres of activity.

So, it is no surprise that its usage is increasing at a fast pace all over the world, including India. The number of internet users worldwide will likely touch 500 million by 2020. India, in the next three years, is expected to be the second-largest population of internet users, says a report updated on NDTV's website. The report was updated by the Internet and Mobile Association of India on the website of NDTV on January 15, 2015, 00:49 IST. The number of online users will rise to more than half

a billion by 2018. Besides, users in rural areas are expected to go up from 29 % in 2013 to nearly 50% in the next three years. The increase in the number of online users is significant and all these features including easy accessibility and less expenditure encourage more people to take advantage of this technology. The Internet has tremendous potential to empower the population living on the margins of society. Besides, it helps to provide a platform for the representation of minorities and other groups from socio-economically marginalized sections of society or even gender groups. Such groups or individuals provide their framing of particular issues, news and events positioned around their interpretations and backgrounds. There extend to everyday as well as mundane issues within different contexts. Like-minded individuals as social media users sharing interests and beliefs is a recurring element online. These individuals can be geographically distributed connected through digital technology synchronously or asynchronously.

### **Review of Literature**

The use of Social Media has evinced a lot of research attention, and numerous studies have been conducted on the increased usage of social media and its impact, particularly on youngsters and teenagers. Copper et al. (2000) discusses online sexuality as a whole exploring a wide range of topics such as internet relationships, sexual information and regarding the relevance of this present study, alternative communities and disenfranchised people. Couldry (2003) argues that the impact and implication of social media are pertinent because social media are beyond just technical development. Social media creates space for interaction which implies that this research study focuses on a practical theological investigation of the implications of the influence of social media on youth ministry, and how, through social media, a youth minister can create a theological framework that will influence young people's self-identity as they interface with social media.

O'Connor and MacKeogh (2007) explore the possibility of developing and sustaining a sense of community in a virtual world minus regular face to face interaction concluding that female members of an online discussion board felt empowered and used the site as a space for bonding, which is similar to the concept of SNS, where people with shared identity such as sexuality may feel a greater sense of togetherness. Johnson and Pupilampu (2008) revealed that exposure to the internet is so vast in children at present that it is measured as an immediate alternative environment the child is affected by. To ascertain the motives behind Social Networking Sites usage, Barker (2009) in his study found that the chief motivation for using social networking sites for adolescents was to communicate with peers.

According to HennigThurau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy and Skier (2010) New Media are websites and other digital

communication and information channels where active consumers engage in behaviours. In contrast to traditional media, they can be consumed by other people in real-time or long afterwards regardless of their physical location.

Sibona and Walczak (2011) offer a typology for research on social network sites and show that this research and in particular in Facebook cover wide areas include identity management, trust, self-presentation, surveillance and privacy concerns, and social capital. Chen (2012) believes that the new media sphere made the process of information retrieving both available and convenient to users. Therefore, in contrast to traditional media, new platforms enable the audience to be online instantly with minimum effort and interact with other users constantly.

Reyae and Ahmed (2015) defined SNSs as 'an online service, platform, or a site that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, who share interests or activities. Social networks encompass the interactions among different individuals, members of a community or members across different communities.

Further, according to Gunduz (2017), social media has become a widely discussed media form, which nonetheless is in plain sight, because users can share their opinions, emotions and thoughts without having to impose self-censorship and because its content is created primarily by users. Similarly, the study of Kwiatkowska (2019) lists several motives for children's internet use, including the affinity with a computer, seeking information, recreational reasons, avoidance of boredom, making new friends and socializes with old ones. The study also suggested that moderate use of digital technology tends to be beneficial for children's mental well-being, while no use or too much use can have a small negative impact. Maria & etal (2020) reveals that the older the adolescents' age, the more likely they were to engage in cyberbullying. Teenagers who are schooling in big cities showed a higher tendency to engage in cyberbullying.

Hence a deeper thought about various aspects of social media usage and adequately reviewing the existing studies provide useful insights in understanding the overall scenario of the social media sphere and identity formation.

### **Identity in Social Media**

The concept of identity has been a subject of debate and discussion in many disciplines throughout the social sciences. But one of the important factors of the concept of identity is linked to the self-concept or self-identity. Authors like Capozza and Brown (2000) writes that self-concept is a person's mental and conceptual awareness, including physical, psychological and social attributes. It has at least three major qualities to consider -first, it is learned, second, it is organized, and third, it is dynamic. Therefore, it can be stated that an individual's identity is not static but contextual and multi-faceted. Further,

the individual identity of a person can be both social and personal. Social Identity Theory is concerned with individuals as a part of a social group, how they identify with the group, behave and adopt shared attitudes to outsiders. According to Tajfel(1984) first sought to differentiate between those elements of self-identity derived from individual personality traits and interpersonal relationships (personal identity) and those derived from belonging to a particular group (social identity). McGarty et. al., 1994 however believes that Social identity involves three central ideas: categorization; identification; and comparison. Manuel Castells (2009) has called social networks self mass communication referring to a global system of interaction on the network, a system in which platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, integral, Google plus provide important tools to boost the performance of online identity.

An individual's online activity encompasses multiple social media platform often simultaneously and the practices on one platform can inform how we behave on others. We need to study the changing patterns and function around different platforms as internet-mediated communication moves from social networking sites to social media and identity. Social media is both a successor to and a replacement of social networking sites (Boyd and Ellison, 2008) which is partially overlapped with the idea of web 2.0, sites (Allen, 2012). As technologies and uses continue to evolve, social media itself is being replaced by others terms that reflect the group importance of mobile devices, apps and ubiquitous media. Media are not separated disconnected phenomena. There are social media practices specific to individual platforms and reflective of social media cultures but these are also rooted in social political and technological contents and norms. Online and offline are closely interlinked and impact one another. As a social identity is created and shared online using cyberspaces, these online social identities are mostly different from the real identity of the person. Hence a person creates an online identity to participate in any virtual communication as per his/her social-cultural and political mindset, therefore ends up creating an identity which is mostly called an online or virtual identity.

### **Construction and Negotiation Of Virtual Identity**

An online or we can say a virtual identity is a form of identity that is created by the use of social media, hence can be argued that a virtual identity is digital identity. Creating identity and its exposure represent the moment when individuals use spaces where they can create it and display it in a social context. Identity plays a very important role in the self-concept (Zhao et al., 2008). Self-concept is the sum of a person's thoughts and feelings about oneself as an object (Rosenberg, 1986), and identity is that part of the self 'by which we are known to others' (Altheide, 2000, p. 2). Therefore, we can say that an online identity is also considered a second Life, as virtual identity is an entity that was created in cyberspace to

express one’s feelings and thoughts. Virtual identity includes both virtual and non-virtual elements.

In recent years socialmedia has experienced widespread popularity within our society (Digital Market Ramblings 2014), starting froms mall personal webpages to full-blown mass communication networks where the user can give or find almost any information about them selves or others within minutes. Authors Dorian Wiszniewski and Richard Coyne in the book Building the Virtual Communities,approached online identity as assert wherever the individual creates social interaction in the social sphere he portraits mask of his identity.Individuals by entering a new community, where any personal information is directly shown to others, is a possibility of experiencing a different self and thus to show and build a new virtual identity of the self and the world at the large.The further online environment also provides space for the expression of one’s “hidden selves” (Suler, 2002) and the experimentation with various non-conventional identities (Rosenmann & Safir, 2006). As such, in today society internet plays an important role in identity empowerment, as the virtual world makes an individual very sudden and comprehensive role-switches. Online environments can in these circumstances allow “gated” individuals to create the identities they hope to present but are not able to carry out in face-to-face situations (Bargh et al., 2002; McKenna et al., 2002). Tosun & Lajunen (2010) suggested that global personality traits may explain social Internet use to some extent.

An individual’s online identity adds more information to his/her space in terms of the information shared, style of vocabulary and in terms of the media content uploaded and shared.In today's technological world, digital literacy has gained importance, just as media literacy inprevious ages. Adrian (2008) refers to the virtual world as a field of liquid identity because nobody knows who is individual and virtual identities can very quicklyself-determined than the pre-set. Virtual identity can also be argued as second life as it reveals the new identity of real life. Media users in the social spaces provide an opportunity to be free from social norms, family pressures and challenges faced in the real life. In the present society, there has been a clashbetween real and virtual identity.According to Junglas (2007) what motivates the individual to create virtual identities, can play a dominant role in real life.

**Methodology**

The method of research for this paper is empirical through the survey approach. For this purpose,a semi-structured interview schedule has been made use of by the researchers for data collection among a cross-section of population-based in the Kashmir region. Furthermore, the researchers have also considered social identity theory for abetter understanding of the research problem under study. For this part of the paper, the researcher has adopted the survey method with complete participation of the

researchers by revealing the identity and purpose of the research under study. On the consent of the participants, the researcher went through the interviews by asking questions directly from the schedule to collect core data and allow the interviewees to express their thoughts and opinions. Furthermore different socio-cultural parameters were taken into consideration while selecting the participants. With the frame of survey method, the selection of the sample was done based on a simple random and purposive sampling basis. A total of 150 numbers of respondents were taken into consideration within the age group of 15 to 35 based on gender, age, education and occupation.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This study pertains to the audience perception of social media usage and its impact on individual identity. The hypothesis is that due to the usage of various social media platforms a social identity is changed into a virtual one. The paper lays stress on the fact how online media is changing the social-cultural identity with changing patterns of socialization and social interaction among media users viz a viz social media.

This study has been divided into two parts; the first one provides background details of respondents through quantitative survey research. This has been done using an interview schedule for a sample of 150 respondents. This sample is constituted of different age groups, varying educational affiliations, gender groups, etc. In the second part, the researcher attempts to analyze the media profile of audiences by looking at their social media habits, preferences, opinions etc.

**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

**Table No.1**

**Distribution of respondents according to gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	80	53.3
Female	75	46.7
Total	150	100.0

**Table No.2**

**Distribution of sample according to age**

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15-24	53	35.3
25-34	50	33.3
35+	47	31.3
Total	150	100.0

As far as the gender breakup of respondents is considered 53 percent were men and the remaining 46 percent were women (Table No. 1), whereas, in terms of age distribution, the sample consisted of:

1. 35 percent in the age group of 15-24 years.
2. 33 percent in the age group of 25-34years and
3. 31 percent above 35 years (Table No.2

**Table No.3**

**Distribution of sample according to occupation**

# Periodic Research

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	65	43.3
Housewife/Homemaker	13	8.7
Employed	52	34.7
Business person	11	7.3
Professional	09	6.0
Total	150	100.0

With regard to marital status, 63 percent of respondents were married and 37 percent were unmarried. In terms of the occupation's status of the respondents, 43 percent of respondents were students, 34 percent were employed in different sectors, 8 percent were those who were homemakers and the remaining 7 and 6 percent consists of business persons and professionals (*Table No. 3*).

### SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PROFILE:

The information gathered through the interview schedule from the respondents regarding social media usage and its impact on real-life and virtual identity is compiled and interpreted in this section. It provides a clear picture of the findings of the study.

**Table No.4**

#### Internet Usage

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	135	90
No	15	10
Total	150	100.0

The data on the availability of internet facility reveals that 90 percent of respondents were active users of the Internet and the remaining 10 percent of the sample were those who don't use internet. They mainly consist of those sample of the population who were mostly in the upper age groups or homemakers and don't use the internet in any means.

Further, when the respondents were asked how they access the internet, the majority of the 70 percent of the sample among those who have internet access prefer smartphones. The reason for the same is attributed to its portability and availability of internet facility at any time without much interference.

**Table No. 5**

#### Pattern of Internet Usage

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regularly	95	63
Occasionally	10	07
Alternate days	25	17
Can't say/Don't remember	05	03
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100

The data on the pattern on internet usage reveals that 63 percent of respondent's access the internet regularly and 17 percent access on an alternate day basis, 7 percent consist of those

populations who access the internet on an occasional basis and the remaining 3 percent did not reveal any patterns their pattern of usage. One of the main reasons for respondents to use the internet daily is to communicate with one another. With its multiple platforms like email, blogging, messaging, entertainment, news, feedback among others this makes the internet one of the most important mode of information communication and entertainment in present contemporary society.

**Table No.6**

#### Time spent on the internet in a day

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	20	13.3
1-2 hours	2	1.33
Up to 4 hours	20	13.3
Up to 6 hours	35	23.3
Up to 8 hours	40	26.6
More than 8 hours	8	5.33
24 hours/ whole day	10	6.6
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

When the respondents were asked about the time spend on Internet activity, the majority of the 26 percent spend up to 8 hours daily on the internet, whereas 23 percent spend 4 hours daily. Furthermore, 13 percent each consist of those who prefer 1-4 hours and 2 percent of sample spend 1 hour daily on the internet for different purposes. The remaining 5 and 6 percent consist of those sample that are most active internet users and spend more than 8 hours or a full day on the internet, whereas there was only 10 percent of populations among the sample pool who don't use the internet. This specifies that a maximum number of respondents use the internet for more than eight hours a day. According to the Global Web Index's Social Media Trends report of 2019, on average digital consumer spent nearly 2.5 hours every day on social media platforms. As per the results rising use of the internet in Kashmir is particularly attributed to the fact at most instances particularly after the recent unrest from 2008 to 2016 the valley has witnessed frequent internet and communication disruptions due to which the overall activity and usage increase after its activation.

**Table No.7**

#### Do you use the internet to talk or send messages to family and friends

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	125	83.3
No	10	6.66
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

# Periodic Research

With regard to the respondent's preferences whether they send a message and talk to friends/family on the internet the data reveals that the majority of the 83 percent prefer to use the internet for said activity whereas only 6 percent of the population don't use the internet for communication purpose and the remaining 10 percent include those sample who don't use the internet. When the respondents were asked do they think there has been increased social media availability and use, the majority of them were in support of the view. Further, as revealed during the study adults of all age groups consider the internet as an important tool for maintaining connections with family members, but in contrast youth or we can say people of young age believe it is a platform to meet new people and to remain in touch with friends.

**Table No.8**

**Do you use social media to network with others?**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	120	80
No	15	10
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

With regard to the respondent's preferences whether they use social media to network with others reveal that, majority 80 percent of them were of the view that they use social media to build networking with others whereas 10 percent were not in support of the view and the remaining 10 percent including those who don't use the internet. Most respondents believe that within this paradigm cell phones are the most widely used medium to network with others and have a positive influence on the quality of communications. Among the total sample only a small percentage of the sample reveals that technologies decrease the quality of their traditional communications, these mostly include those who are in the adult age group.

**Table No.9**

**How often do you use social networking sites?**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regularly	115	76.6
Alternate days	15	10
Can't say/Don't remember	5	3.3
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

Social Media Networks vary in popularity with different socio-economic and cultural settings. Research by Global Web Index shows that globally, 53.6% of the world's population uses social media. The data about the pattern of social media usage among respondents reveals that 76 percent of respondents were regular users of social media whereas 10 percent use social media on alternate days. Furthermore, respondents further reveal that social media provide means of self-expression

through different networking sites. Those who daily access social networking sites mainly includes business persons and youth who use these platforms to fill their respective needs which range from business to entertainment.

Moreover, when the respondents were asked which social media group they use, 60 percent of respondents use WhatsApp and Facebook as the social group for their usage and 16 percent were of the view that they use Instagram as their preference for social group and the remaining 6 percent each includes those who use Telegram and other social groups for their desired purposes and 10 percent were those who don't use the internet.

**Table No.10**

**Do you use social media to market your business/work etc**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	125	83.3
No	4	2.6
Can't say	6	4
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

Social media marketing has increased due to the growing active use of social media sites and their users. One of the main uses is to interact with audiences in multi-dimensional ways to spread information and awareness about various business activities. This two-way communication process has where people can interact with each other has brought an overall change from social to the virtual scenario. When the respondents were asked do they use social media to market their business/work etc, the majority of the 83 percent were in support of the view whereas only 3 percent of the respondents were against the argument. Furthermore, 4 percent of respondents include those who were unable to answer and the remaining 10 percent were those who don't use the internet.

**Table No.11**

**Do you use social media to build social contacts?**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	110	73.3
No	10	6.6
Can't say	15	10
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

The data on the pattern of whether social media help to build social contact reveals that 73 percent of respondents believe that they use social media to build such contacts whereas only 6 percent of the respondents were said it does not. The remaining 10 each include those who were unable to answer and those who don't use the internet respectively. Thus, it is evident from the results that social media has the power to diversify and evolve one's social network in a limited amount of time and

nurture the relationship over time. As evident from the results, a maximum number of respondents from the sample actively use social media platforms to build social contacts.

**Table No.12**

**Do you think social identity create a new identity of a person?**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	125	83.3
No	5	6.6
Can't say	5	6.6
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

When the respondents were asked do social identity create a new identity of person, interestingly 83 percent were in support of the view whereas only 6 percent of the respondents believe it does not and other 6 percent include those who were unable to answer and the remaining 10 percent were those who don't use internet. Hence can be argued that with the usage of social media a new identity of the individuals is created which is different from the one of the real life. Social identity of a person is usually based on the social group he/she belongs to, a sense of social world to make self-concepts. Based on the survey discussion with respondents it can be also argued that individuals can and do act as both individual persons and social groups and that, since both exist objectively, both personal and social categorical self-categorizations provide valid representations of the self in differing social contexts.

**Table No.13**

**Do you think real-life habits have changed due to social media impact?**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	130	86.6
No	5	6.6
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

The data regarding whether real-life habits have changed due to social media impact/usage, 86 percent of respondents believe yes it does change whereas only 6 percent of respondents reveal it does not. The remaining 10 percent include those who don't use the internet. Hence, online interactions among different multi-media platforms have altogether changed the habits as people have almost forgotten to live real lives. Respondents consider that online interactions with a wide range of networks have become a lot easier and less time consuming with services like WhatsApp and other messenger apps being dominant. Further, sending voice and video messages through social media now becomes a new trend. Due to this, people can do many more conversations in a short time but on the flip side the traditional thought processes have changed

**Table No.14**

**Why you use social media?**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Interaction/ sharing	45	30
Show online visibility	60	40
Entertainment	20	13.3
Can't say	10	6.6
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

When the respondents were asked why they use social media the data revealed that, majority of the population 40 percent use social media only to show their online visibility whereas 30 percent of them use social media for interaction and sharing of photo/video. Furthermore, 13 percent of them use social media for entertainment purpose and 6 percent include those who were unable to answer. The remaining 10 percent were those who don't use the internet. According to feedback from respondents, the internet is a great way to connect with the outside world. The most common responses noted during the survey were internet is an easy way to locate & connect with other people, sharing real-time activity, information, sharing of data, for entertainment, socializing.

**Table No.15**

**What do you think social media may bring?**

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bright Future	50	33.3
Gloomy Future	65	43.3
Will not bring any change	14	9.3
Can't say	6	4
Don't use	15	10
Total	150	100.0

When the respondents were asked what they think social media may bring in the future, 43 percent believe that social media bring a gloomy future and 33 percent were of the view that its usage brings a bright future. Furthermore, 9 percent of them believe it will not bring any change and 4 percent include those who were unable to answer. The remaining 10 percent were those who don't use the internet. Further, the results reveal that the future of social media usage will be largely decided by smartphone activity. According to an estimate, over 3 billion people have access to mobile phones by 2020, which means more and more people both in an urban and rural setting are using different types of smartphones as their main source for accessing social platforms.

**Conclusion**

Social media is a powerful tool for shaping identity, which is regarded as an extension of everyday life transformed with new global platforms and methods. It has become a widely discussed

media form because users can share their opinions, emotions and thoughts without any communication barriers or censorship, thus reaches different segments of society. However, with the changing trends in the global communication sphere, individuals use online space provided on social media by sharing personal information thus creating a new virtual identity through communication with anonymous users. This virtual identity helps people irrespective of socio-economic and cultural background to overcome various social constraints and communicate freely with different users thus promoting a more enlightened exchange of ideas.

Results of the study, confirm that social media platforms create a new identity or may be named as the virtual identity of an individual with the increasing use and availability of social media channels. It was also revealed from the findings that, most of the respondents were regular social media users, which in turn help to create a new social identity to promote their business, work, and build online contacts etc. What was more interesting to note that, in today's contemporary society smartphones have been seen as a tool to the virtual world on a portable and affordable basis for immediate to and from response. Different online social groups indicate that the user alters the perception of one's self which may also involve the purchase decision processes.

Hence the study brings to the fore, that social media significantly influence virtual identity by the desire to present one's self in a way to accomplish online visibility, the new identity of a person, build social contact, network with others that are ideally different from the one in the real life. Further with the usage of virtual identity a person has entirely different multiple identities and habits with the use of multiple social groups and platforms. This virtual identity may coalesce with the user's real identity or may be contrary to the same. The socio, psychological and economic of virtual identity have shown far-reaching implications in people real-time relationships and real-time activities, this has been for the good as well as the opposite. These phenomena cut across cultures, geographical boundaries and social situations.

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