

VIRTUAL IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF SNAPCHAT (2016-17)

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ABSTRACT. This paper is about the growing use of Snapchat among the youngsters, the content they share on Snapchat and its effect on interpersonal relationships of consumers. The study is taken out on the sample of 300 selected randomly from the universities of Lahore, Pakistan. The survey method was used as the research tool. The virtual identities at social media application are helpful for real life relations. Youngsters use this social media application often to connect with their friends and close relations and it is significant for strengthening interpersonal relationships. Young people use Snapchat for sharing funny stuff and personal feelings through

snap.

Keywords: Virtual Identities; Social Media; Snapchat.

1. **Introduction** The study intended to understand pervasion of Snapchat among the users, for building and maintaining friendships and how it influence inter-personal behaviors. It focuses on determination of social relationships at different level though Snapchat. Snapchat is emerging as a formidable networking source among the youngsters and hence the study anticipated to explore its' effects on the young girls of 13 to 25 years

Internet connects the devices and masses to each other from anywhere in the world via dedicated routers and servers and enable sharing of all kinds of information such as text, graphics, audios, videos, and computer programs. It was primarily developed to assist the progress and has grown out providing billions of web pages, thousands of services for information and entertained and social interaction platforms. It is turned out to be the business administrative as well with the online banking, shopping and much more.

The social websites have made it possible to stay connected with the friends and people anytime and anywhere. Since the first appearance of social media in 1997 it has boomed almost every aspect of life in 2017. The sway of the social media is transforming lives especially of the young adults. SixDegrees.com was the pioneer social media website offering a list of people to connect with and search others [1]. In the previous decade young adults have been recorded to be the steadfast consumer of the social media with biggest appearance group among the other age groups [2].

Around 11.1 billion young adults of 18-29 years employed social media [3] with hustled online activity. This zeal of young adults towards social mediums raised the question that how it is creating a sense of closeness for the young adults.

Social media is infused so well that in cultural communication the term technology is being muddled with it, despite of the clear distinction. Deploying the technology and accessing the social media anyone can share photos, update their status, express opinion and views and connect with friends through smartphone, tablet or computers.

It is renovating the communicating patterns and the way of making and maintain relations. When consider online communication entertaining and reliable , they want it to be more in use. Without having a personal interaction or segregating meetings anyone can preserve the link with the other person successfully but can be less satisfying and a little candid. The most enjoyed platforms are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, Myspace, Flickr, WordPress, Blogger, Typepad, LiveJournal, Wikipedia, Wetpaint, Wikidot, Second Life, Reddit, Lulu and many others [4].

These sites proffer the users with all-embracing means to be in touch allowing people to build their profiles and share content like photos, audios, videos and words (Social Media, 2010). Where holding divergent aims and featuring distinctive traits they can all be disintegrated predominantly a place with a connections list that makes it a place for establishing and assembling the friendly relationships [1].

The social media application Snapchat appeared in 2011 and got popularity for its snaps. Before this it was believed that movies as means of visual communication are the source of the interpersonal communication tool between the peer's groups [5]. Snaps can be in the form of short videos, photos, text or drawings. The snaps disappear after a scheduled time decided by the sender from one to ten seconds. The idea of snaps at the app was acquaint with showing the picture to the friends without making a copy at their device but likely to capture the screenshot of the snap however the sender is notified for this action. This app uses an algorithm for evaluating the user's best friend identifying the user snapped the most [6].

Rationale of the Study Snapchat has more than 100 million existing users up till the era and has the majority ranging from 18 to 34 years age. The app has touched around 6 billion views on video a day, and has abridged the fissure of the videos view at the chief competitor Facebook. Snapchat has emanated massively and coming out to be among the leading social media websites. Various large corporations, outlets, and networks are using it for marketing, news breaking and providing entertainment.

The trend of snapping at this app and purpose can be understood by the activities of the young adults and the content they share with friends. The influence of Snapchat on interpersonal relationships and behaviors is envisioned as computer mediated communications are having implication on interpersonal communication provided a ground to explore all these facts [7].

Significance of the study The Snapchat study is relatively in its infancy but there have been quite a few attempts to study and identify its consumption, especially in Pakistan. Many researchers conducted study delineating content users share at Snapchat [8]. Several have worked on emotional effects and motivations for using Snapcha [9].

Billings, Qiao, Conlin and Nie (2015) examined Snapchat in a sports context first, investigating fandom and recognition for sport-related interaction [10]. This study is best supported by the uses and gratification (U&G) approach of media as individuals use media to satisfy instinctive felt needs.

The research emphasized on the behavior of youngsters towards their friends and the habits indulged with the objectives as; 1) to find the influences of Snapchat on family relationships, 2) to explore the fact that if using Snapchat makes user isolated, 3) to identify if Snapchat has made communication less meaningful and less personal, 4) to discover negative impacts of Snapchat on youngsters.

Hypotheses

H₁: Snapchat enhances interpersonal relationships in youngsters.

H₂: Snapchat is source of less meaningful communication.

Research Questions

- Do Snapchat create isolation or good interpersonal relationships among users?
- What is the influence of Snapchat on interpersonal relationships?
- Which type of content is mostly being shared on Snapchat?

2. **Literature Review** Snapchat has become the third most accessed social media and millennial spent their most of the time on Snapchat to follow sports. Youngsters devote their time for sport related communications at Snapchat [10].

Snapchat users are found frequent to access the app for passing time, sharing personal issues and feelings, and cultivating social knowledge in the comparison study of four social networking websites. The content at Snapchat has self-destructive nature. The sharing of selfies and funny stuff is associated with bonding [11].

Snapchat as a social stage allows users to share images, videos, and text for a specified time after which it will be permanently inaccessible for the receiver. The in-depth interviews and focus group with young adults of 18 to 23 years indicated that Snapchat serves as an ambiguous weapon of communication modality that might bring interactive challenges but also facilitates harmonious communication within interpersonal

relationships. The use of this app is intended for the closest friends only [12].

Snapchat is successful in shedding early negative reputation and has become one of the most unfaithfully popular part of social media. Qualitative analysis has disclosed that primarily fast friends interact on Snapchat and interaction with those having less personal ties is rare to nonexistent. It indicates that a well-built social tie on a personal level is pre-requisite for connecting digitally [13]. Social media either have a positive or a negative effect. Youths often access social media in every slight leisure time which wrecks their social ethics. A case study of the Sololo Ward, Marsabit County on 70 respondents from 4 schools divulged that social media is overwhelmingly popular among Kenyan youths and one of the major contributors to moral degeneration [14].

Communication between close friends on social media is considered as social media maintenance. Public post to friends is more to make the social presence and being active at social media than giving message. Interactions with unfamiliar people have greater effects on social contacts at social media than with close friends. More self-esteem is associated with more time spent on social media as users take the time to epitomize them in a positive fashion that boost confidence, deliberately putting something on profile that others can associate with [15].

Millennial use social media at two different portals at-least in 30 minutes on mobile phones and computer [16]. Sexting via Snapchat and social media websites is patently prevailing and stigmatized among youth and directly influencing social norms [17].

The social media platforms sharing content for limited time period have become perpetual constituent of the social ecosystem. Interactions linked at Snapchat are lower in support than other social media platforms. It is intended for sharing more than for emotional rewards as it is lightweight [7]. The shot living posts and temporary posts at Snapchat have given rise to ephemeral communication and it is increasing [18].

Social media will endure to stay prevalent as it is an outlet for expression and has the potential to evolve. It is a way to stay consistent with the distant friends in real world [19]. Snapchat is self-destructive media and selfies at Snapchat have implications for the youngsters such as practice for self-surveillance and social mobility [20].

Youngers tend to connect with unfamiliar people at social media that they do not have personal ties with in real life while older connect with those they already have strong ties in real life. Younger see those friendships valuable for future networking [21]. The foremost reasons of using social media are participation, conversation, connectedness, and community. Snapchat has the ability of making and preserving friendship [22].

The photos disappearing feature at Snapchat is promoting sexting among young people [23]. Communication with peer group is the motivation to use Social Network Site (SNS) and those high in self-esteem are more likely to communicate with peers [24].

3. Theoretical Framework: Gratifications Theory emphasize on the active audience and user having their own needs, motives and gratifications. It attempts to explain what needs, media fulfill for individuals, groups, and society in three objectives; explaining the use mass communication gratification of needs, discerning motives for using media and ascertaining the positive and the negative costs.

At the core of this theory rests the postulation that individuals actively seek out the mass media to please their needs [25]. It says that consumers of media and technology are active, self-aware, and aim directed [26]. It brings the sources in competition to satisfy consumer's needs and developments in media and technology have been conveyed [27]. The habit of using Snapchat and its impact on interpersonal relationships of youngsters of Lahore can be explored under Uses and Gratification as using Snapchat is a cure of boredom, source of entertainment, and passing time.

4. Research Methodology: The case study of Snapchat for investigation of virtual identities and social media; is a quantitative applied was applied to collect the data. The survey on the sample selected from the population of students of Lahore has been conducted using a questionnaire. The selected universities were Lahore College for Women University, University of Punjab, University of Central Punjab, and National College of Arts. The students were selected through simple random sampling technique and of 300 youngsters. In the following study Snapchat is the independent and virtual identities (behavior) is the dependent variable.

5. Data Analysis, Discussion and Interpretation of Result

Table 1. Correlations among the variables

		Snapchat is source of increasing interpersonal relationships	Snapchat is helpful in developing new relationships	Snapchat is the best cure of boredom	Snapchat is beneficial in finding new relationships	Snapchat is more convenient for romantic relationships	share funny snaps
Snapchat is source of increasing interpersonal relationships?	Pearson Correlation	1	.126*	.284**	.355**	.286**	-.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.030	.000	.000	.000	.297
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Snapchat is helpful in developing new relationships	Pearson Correlation	.126*	1	.077	.171**	.122*	.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030		.183	.003	.035	.061
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Snapchat is the best cure of boredom	Pearson Correlation	.284**	.077	1	.304**	.346**	.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.183		.000	.000	.124
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Snapchat is beneficial in finding new relationships	Pearson Correlation	.355**	.171**	.304**	1	.543**	.121*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.000		.000	.037
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Snapchat is more convenient for romantic relationships	Pearson Correlation	.286**	.122*	.346**	.543**	1	-.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.035	.000	.000		.398
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
share funny snaps	Pearson Correlation	-.060	.108	.089	.121*	-.049	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.297	.061	.124	.037	.398	
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a positive linear correlation thus the hypotheses “snapchat increases interpersonal relationships “is accepted. Hypothesis “snapchat is source of less meaningful communication” is also accepted. The significant level is 0.05 which is less than one so both hypotheses are accepted.

Researcher collected data through survey and the 300 male and female respondents of 13 to 25 years were being part of the study. The findings show 80% of youth has access to social media at all times. It was found that 29% of youth use Snapchat continuously, 17% use it often, 29% sometimes open it but not regularly, 9% seldom access it and other 25% never used Snapchat. Very few parents use this application as the results found that 83% parents have not installed it or familiar with this application.

Present study revealed that 16% of youngsters consider Snapchat as source of pleasure every time while 21% often acquire pleasure, 35% sometimes, 11% seldom and 25% did not find it a source of pleasure. It is a best time pass opportunity for 21% of youth and 26% youth use Snapchat almost always for entertainment, 28% use often for entertainment, 23% sometimes, 7% seldom and 20% had never.

Further it found that 8% youth contemplate Snapchat as almost always source of jealousy among the social circle, other 18% often find it a source of jealousy and 18% sometimes but no jealousy prevails in lives of youth due to Snapchat. It is a wastage of time for 13% youth, 33% were moderate in their response and other 19% also seldom find it only as consumption of time. Inquired about the security 39% agreed that it is safer and 30% disagreed other 40% were neutral. In this regard 15% respondents strongly agreed that Snapchat is securer than other social media websites, 45% agreed, 9% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed while 32% were neutral.

It is discovered that Snapchat is source of cyber bullying for 8% youth and other 32% also agreed, 43% remained neutral and 21% disagreed. It upsurge interpersonal relationships and 36% were agreed on it and 34% were not while others were impartial. Parents can use it for connecting with their children is strongly suggested by 4% respondents, 24% hold this view, 25% disagreed, 15% strongly disagreed and others detached. It can lessen the worry regarding children among the parents majorly supported by 61% respondents.

The Snapchat study found it is useful source of expressing emotions easily supported by 54% respondents agreed and not by 16%, majority can easily share their personal thoughts and feelings of being happy, sad, romantic and excited at Snapchat. The emotions can be different in different relationships. It is also found that 10% youth share snaps with their close relationships only and not with unknown people, 43% also agreed. In this regard 47% share snaps with their siblings and parents also and it intensifies interpersonal relationships.

The study established that Snapchat is helpful in developing new relationships as 7% strongly supported it, 40% agreed, 28% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed and others were unbiased. It is the best cure for boredom for 58% youth. But, it is creating isolation in physical social gatherings among the users as 9% strongly agreed and 35% agreed, 38% remained neutral, 20% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. Young people not always share funny stuff rather there are also emotional snaps as 26% agreed and 52% were not. The emotional snaps are shared to romantic relationships by 46% youth and not by 29% and the remaining were not taking sides. It is the way this application can be useful for the relationships. It is convenient for carrying romantic relationships for 40% youth; out of them 10% strongly agreed and 30% agreed, on the other than 20% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed and 30% were independent.

It is also beneficial in finding new relationships found by 42% approved, 31% remained neutral, and 29% differed. It is best application to socialize for 24% youngsters.

Conclusion: Social media websites have turned out to be an essential part of lives of modern people and Snapchat is one of them, users feel incomplete without. The purpose of this study was firstly to explore the role and impact of this app on interpersonal relationships; whether improve or not, as attitude has a clear relationship with intention. Secondly to explore the content of snaps shared by youth of Lahore and explore which kind of snaps are being shared by the youngsters. The clear and effective approach of the researcher has gone through survey on the youth of Lahore selected by simple random sampling, Pakistan and explored how this application emergent with respect to Pakistan. Youngsters from Lahore College for Women University, University of Punjab, University of Central Punjab and National College of Arts as participant of this study answered the 26% close ended questions and they were analyzed through statistical tools. Both hypotheses of the study were accepted and the study has achieved its objectives quite sufficiently. The objectives of the study indicate concerned motivation of researcher, which managed to complete the data collection. In regard to the first objective of finding the influences of Snapchat on family relationships, it is found that most of the parents of youth do not use Snapchat while it can be a source of overview and trust among parents and children as connecting through social media lessen their worry about children. So it is a positive outcome of Snapchat for strong interpersonal relationships. Users share snaps with close relationships

i.e. parents, siblings and friends and progress their interpersonal relationships Present study also revealed that Snapchat is beneficial in developing new relationships. No clear conclusion can be made on the fact that Snapchat can be source of isolation or not as majorly the participants were neutral in their opinion; it was the second objective of the study. To know if Snapchat has made communication less meaningful and less personal was researcher's third objective and it is interpreted that it is a source of less meaningful communication because most of the stuff shared on the app is meaningless. The study reveals that youth of Lahore mostly access Snapchat for time pass or entertainment and not for constructive purpose. To find negative impacts of Snapchat on youngsters was the last objective and no substantial negative impacts of Snapchat are found. A few negative impacts can be affecting such as time waste but the interaction with friends and sharing emotions are the considerable factors. The hypothesis testing conclude that Snapchat enhances interpersonal relationships of youngsters and it is the best app for sharing emotions with interpersonal relationships.

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