

Example of virtual communities essay

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Virtual Realism can be considered a form of art, an emotional response or a means of existing with up-to-the-minute technology. In view of the fact that the personal computers are now an integral part of the contemporary lifestyle, the residences and workplaces have all the time more faded as screens are bright with glowing colors. Virtual reality has become the language and standard of living. However, such technological advancements prevailing in the society have stirred a debate regarding the times to come. The people who idealize networking and support virtual communities are in favor of the development of such virtual communities. On the other hand, there are a lot of people for whom networking and existence of virtual communities has given rise to an electronic culture that has promoted joblessness and criminal violence (Heim 1998).

It is crystal clear that the virtual communities have been introduced and advanced by a kind of technology which possesses the power and potential to cause massive influence over the common man at moderately small cost. This influence brings change in people logically, socially, commercially, and most importantly politically. However, this potential is not fulfilled by the technology only. Instead, the technical strength and passage of virtual communities has to be made use of by a knowledgeable and intelligent modern population. Currently, virtual communities are being used by millions and millions of informed people who know how to use them independently ensuring that technology is living up to its zenith (Rheingold 1993).

As far as the question that whether virtual communities are real or not, the

answer is simple. The monitor screens are being used by people who are a part of virtual communities and they “ exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk” (Rheingold 1993, p. xviii). Thus, it is so obvious that at virtual communities, people do more or less everything that can be done in reality with the exception that bodies are not involved in carrying out those activities (Rheingold 1993).

Although, there is no way to kiss or punch anyone; still a lot can take place within the boundaries of virtual communities in cyberspace. Virtual communities have drawn, attracted and addicted millions of people by offering the luxury, verve and liveliness of computer-linked cultures. It can be said without any doubt that virtual communities have changed and are changing the real-life experiences of both individuals and communities (Rheingold 1993).

The term “ virtual community” has been coined by Rheingold. According to him, “ People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life” (Renninger & Shumar 2002, p. xxvi). The communities in real life are more organic and interesting content can be shared by people who share the space. On the other hand, there is a higher level of premeditated content in the virtual communities. If truth be told, the communities that are physical in nature are commonly observed to be present in adjoining space and have short-term orchestration. As far as physical communities are concerned, people in them share issues, resources, excellence of living, assistance etc.

on the strength of spatial and sequential magnitude (Renninger & Shumar 2002).

On the other hand, the communities developed with the technology of Internet are more characteristically theorized as electronic town halls, everyday life closed societies or communes that are put out of place spatially and chronologically. Another reason why virtual communities can also be considered to exist as real communities is that an individual user cannot actively participate in all the things going on incessantly. This is just like physical communities where it is impossible for a person to demonstrate active participation continuously in the activities. In actual fact, people who are members of virtual communities have the advantage of assuming a number of various roles. Moreover, it is also easy for such members to “change their conceptions about their possibilities as a function of their activity with a site over time” (Renninger & Shumar 2002, p. 6).

As far as relationships in the virtual communities are concerned, they are normally defined by individual interests and not by propinquity or nearness. Thus, the individuals who meet each other in virtual communities are bonded by mutual or differing interests, mindsets, events etc. The members of virtual communities get to know each other in discussion groups or social networking websites like Facebook, Orkut, Twitter etc. It is being acknowledged that there is just a permeable boundary between the physical and virtual communities. Thus, it is rather a complicated matter to theorize any of the two communities as an entirely disconnected unit (Renninger & Shumar 2002).

Virtual communities and chat rooms have eliminated the barriers of space

and time making communication easy, simple and rapid. Long-distance conviviality has become instant. Thus, through Internet-powered virtual communities, people are now introduced with new possibilities of interaction that were not available in the previous times. The enactment of networks has become possible because of this interaction. However, communication through Internet is not as personal as it is through telephone or telegraph (Renninger & Shumar 2002). It means that the interaction and communication through virtual communities does not provide many options as provided to the people in real life as “ there is no voice intonation or facial expression nor are there other extra linguistic cues” (Renninger & Shumar 2002, p. 11). On the other hand, virtual communities offer cheap and instantaneous communication allowing the users to maintain long-distance interactions through sharing of pictures, videos, multimedia etc. (Renninger & Shumar 2002).

The fact that the resources and information stored can be easily used no matter where one is and at what time makes virtual communities rather utopian. Since the time of its advent, the Internet has been regarded as a tool that encourages and facilitates a distinctive manner of universal and indiscriminate reciprocity. This is for the reason that with the passage of time, archived interactions, relations, information etc. have continued to prove practical and valuable. Thus, if compared with physical communities, it is obviously clear that such reciprocity is made available by the virtual communities and has helped people to reach extraordinary levels of closeness, understanding and relationships (Renninger & Shumar 2002).

There are a number of characteristics of current Information Technology due

to which communities today are transforming. There were no other technologies in the times gone by that have changed the basic nature of interpersonal communication better than the contemporary technology. Every one of the earlier technologies was just used for alleviating limitations of interpersonal communication related to time and space. In the beginning, face-to-face personal communication was the only way to converse. However, it was due to 'writing' that restrictions of time and space narrowed down. With the introduction of mails and telephonic conversation, communication was excelled to a greater extent. However, the previous technologies were basically used to communicate with those whom one knew already or those who had a familiar language and civilization with the conversationalist (Mandersheid 2004).

The communities today, on the other hand, have modernized due to technology with the introduction of a number of changes brought by it. The first change is related to the acceleration. For the reason that technology makes instantaneous communication possible, interpersonal communication has turned out to be distinctively swift as users can easily network and socialize within few seconds by few clicks. For instance, one can use the technology of modern times to send e-mails to thousands and thousands of people in less than a minute. Reply and response by the receivers is also feasible. Consequently, rapid interactions take place. Similarly, a rapid increase in negotiations and decisions is also observable. Any sociologist can confirm the recent rapid communication phenomena as the compression of social time (Mandersheid 2004).

Another transformation brought by technology to communities is

equalization as it has fostered communiqué and contact with the use of a network instead of a hierarchal arrangement. As a consequence of this change, the socio-economic positions of people have eliminated as no distinctions are made in virtual communities on the basis of such factors. In simple words, there is no distinction between a common man and the president of a country as far as Internet communication is concerned. This is the wonder of modern Information Technology due to which barriers of social status and cultures that exist between people in the real world are eliminated at all (Mandersheid 2004).

Another change is that of disintermediation brought by the technology of modern era as it has strong potential to eradicate “intervening persons, groups, and organizations, such as “middle men,” from communication and decision loops in favor of direct communication between end users, such as purchaser and producer, constituent and elected official, or health care consumer and physician” (Mandersheid 2004).

Moreover, the Internet possesses such an influential power of communication and information processing that has affected each and every aspect of communal life. This change can be compared with the change that was brought by the electrical grid and engine powered by electricity during the Industrial Age. Today, people have access to a number of tools that allow appropriate communicating power. Not only this, technology has powered people to such a great extent that they are now able to build their own communication systems by using blogs, wikis, podcasts etc. People also make use of file sharing and p2p networks that means peer-to-peer networks for the distribution, combination and configuration of any substance that is

digitized (Castells 2011).

The 1990s was the time period during which enormous public attention was gained by the technological transformations related to computer networks. Stories related to Information superhighway were the main highlights of almost every news and entertainment media. This was the time when people got attracted to the technology and the fortunes associated with the Net. This is the reason why thousands and thousands of people went on purchasing computers for their homes and offices. Although at that time computers were seen as accessories that could only be used by the elite class of the society. However, with the passage of time, their availability increased and right now, there is hardly a place where this technology is not used. Technology is behind everything now and is widely used in every aspect of life; be it personal, communal, political, religious, economic, etc. The network technology is being highlighted by different aspects of it like web, net, cyberspace, online, virtual communities etc. and it is due to these various aspects that the significance, role and influence of technology is defined. Whatever it may be, it is as clear as crystal that every mentioned term refers to the computer networks because of which people are allowed to create a number of new socialized cyberspaces where they can meet up and intermingle with one another with the ease that was never there during the earlier times (Smith & Kollock 1999).

Thus, it is to be understood that computer networks are not the means that let people talk to machines. They are the means through which interaction between people takes place. In cyberspace communities, there are a number of things that are different as compared to face-to-face meetings between

people. These include economies of relations, communiqué and synchronization that is completely different in technology-powered virtual communities. The technology has established thousands and thousands of spaces in cyber world where people related to distant areas can converse and interact without any interference and disruption in a logical and comfortable manner. Thus, technology has transformed the meaning of community in a number of ways as the use of networking sites and virtual communities has made it easier for people “ to discuss a range of topics, play games, entertain one another, and even work on a range of complex collective projects” (Smith & Kollock 1999, p. 3).

On the other hand, a good number of people support virtual communities and their use as they make it more possible for people to become socialized and actively participate as members. People in virtual communities are not judged by their social status or any other factor. This is the reason why people are attracted to be a part of such communities that have no barriers of maturity level, nationality, ethnicity, color, sexual characteristics and orientation etc.

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