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The Real and the Virtual Communities, their Artefacts, their Interactions and the Transformation of Identities of their Members with Special Reference to India

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims at an analysis of the relationship between the real and the virtual communities. With this aim in mind, the following points have been addressed in the paper: (a) the real community, its traits and the identity of its members, (b) the virtual community, its traits, its functional strategy and the identity of its members, (c) the interaction between the real and the virtual communities, exchange of the spaces and the modes, double identities and the emergence of distinctive alternative lifestyle. The real and the virtual communities are formed around the shared social characteristics and the shared individual interests respectively. Among the real communities, the community of academicians has been chosen to illustrate briefly the kind of changes taking place as an effect of the entry of the virtual into this community and the kind of hybrid or a mix pattern of communication, interaction and information-sharing is emerging. India is an example of a new and a mix pattern of the 'spaces' (physical & virtual) and the 'modes' (off-line & on-line) relationship

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where both of them are operating simultaneously. Although, these spaces and the modes have their own merits, as well as, the demerits but the entry of the virtual into the real has changed the horizon of the real. Under the impact of the virtual, the real is likely to shrink while the virtual is likely to expand. The entire paper is based on the secondary source materials.

Keywords: Real and virtual communities, artefacts, real/physical and virtual/cyber spaces, off-line and on-line modes and sociability, stability and ephemerality, interaction, information-sharing, rules of the game, identity, interface, hybridised pattern.

Introduction

The real and the virtual communities are old and new conceptual categories in India. The real communities existed much before 1970 and continue to exist even today but the concept of virtual community is relatively a new concept, although the groups have been interacting on-line since the 1970s. (Ellis, 2004 and Turkle, 1995). Both the real and the virtual are the communities of social interactions, network of relationship and exchange of information, knowledge and experiences. They record, store, organize, transmit and share information but such functions are performed at the platform of the virtual community at a relatively much larger scale and in a different manner than in the real community at the physical space because of the difference in the space and the mode of communication and interactions. The virtual community is a space less, Internet connected computer-mediated electronic community of interaction and communication. This is a gift of the information technology which consists of all the digital gadgets including the computer. They are the electronic tools of rapid communication, affecting every aspect of human life across the globe. The digital devices as forms of Information technology are constantly growing, taking new forms, making their way into every aspect of our daily life and opening up new ways for humans to interact with each other. They are the new ways of recording, storing, organizing and transmitting information. They can accomplish more than one of these functions but the computer can accomplish all of them as it is considered to be a universal machine which can make the society richer by information as compared with the conventional devices of information like the oral tradition, writing down words and information, collection of writings into scrolls and books to provide information, the *gurus* of the oral tradition considered to be the living manifestation of information

which they knew by heart and by memory to be transmitted through the face-to-face interaction in the traditional system of knowledge but now there is a drastic shift from the oral tradition of maintaining the detailed diary of every day events to the modern tradition of maintaining the digital diary of events, storage of information and its dissemination. This is a significant aspect of the modern technologies which make the recording, storing, organizing and disseminating information much easier, faster and almost automatic. The Internet connected computer works like a digital diary of storing different types of information for the users of the Net, and it is the Net which gives rise to what we call as the virtual community or the group formation on-line. Rheingold (1994) says that the 'new formation of on-line groups emerges from the Net when a large number of people gather to form webs of relationships in the cyberspace to carry on public discussions with sufficient human feeling and shared interests'. Thus, the virtual groups with community features emerge and form as the social aggregations in the cyberspace. In this formation, communication, interactions and information-sharing take place electronically in an on-line technical environment. Thus, the formation becomes an electronic version of the real community, although this is disputed, whether the virtual community is actually a community like the real community because the virtual community, unlike the real community, is based on shared interests than the shared social characteristics. When the shared interests are disturbed, the composition of the virtual community is disturbed, and thus, the community becomes instable and ephemeral, although the balance and stability is restored by the continuous process of joining, dropping and rejoining the platform of the virtual community. The virtual life interactions are different than the real life interactions because the virtual is on-line computer-mediated interactions but the real life interactions are off-line face-to-face interactions, and therefore, it is real, existential and physical and that is virtual, symbolic and imagined. So, one is 'real' and the other is 'artificial' with strong and weak social ties respectively but in spite of the weak ties and social and supportive features, the virtual community provides relatively much wider network of the people than the social networks of the real, traditional or the conventional communities. The strong and intimate social ties are not possible in a technical surrounding of on-line interactions, partly because of the flexible and pragmatic character of the virtual community, and partly because it takes time to develop stronger ties to engender the sense of community.

During the pre-computer days, it is the real community with the off-line mode and the face-to-face embodied interactions was predominant and very effective. Its existence at the physical space has traditionally been the integral part of the structure of Indian society which has harboured a variety of such communities, whether they are the tribal or the non-tribal communities which are indigenous, real, spatial and territorial physically and culturally. Such communities are multiple because they are largely based on multiple social particularities of ethnic, caste, class, race, religion, language, profession and similar other factors as the bases of the formation of the real communities. The shared particularities and shared interests, values and affinities govern the formation of the real communities. Since, there are multiple social factors and the variations within, and multiple interests shared by the members of the real communities, there are multiple real communities in which the interactions and information-sharing keep the real communities flowing. The virtual community(s) which is primarily concerned with information, the information like the currency, keeps the virtual community flowing because the members of the virtual community generate and provide information freely to the virtual community to make the community information-rich and the community provides the platform for discussions and information-sharing among the members (Rheingold,1994). Almost, the same process can be observed in the real community in which information is generated, transmitted and received. The receiving end of the continuum is the listener who desires to listen to learn but in the process, the listeners are desired to be active, not inactive and passive, but the virtual more than the real community, suffers from the passive members who view the community content passively. They are lurking members who take benefits (informational, social, recreational, economic, etc.) from the community but they neither make any contribution to the community, nor provide any mutual help. They are less likely to assist each other among the members. They are considered as parasites or the listeners with the desire to listen and learn. They simply increase traffic for the community while the active members create content/information for the community, play active role in discourses and provide mutual help (Vohra & Bhardwaj,2019 and Ellis, 2004).

However, since the formation of the virtual community is a recent phenomenon, the community has not yet become a form of the formal structure of the cyberspace, particularly in the developing countries

where the real communities at the physical space are the basic components of the social structure. Although, the real and the virtual are similar to, as well as, dissimilar from each other. The real community is an organised, structured and embodied community with strong social ties while the virtual is a flexible, ephemeral, instable, disembodied, pseudo and informal type community with weak social ties. And, therefore, the virtual community is questioned, whether, the virtual community is like the real community, whether it is true that the virtual community is the electronic version of the real community, whether the virtual community enriches social relationships and represents real social interactions and the real life community. The views of the scholars in this regard, are both for and against the virtual community. Although, both the communities are the socially networked communities or the neighbourhoods but their spaces and the modes of social interactions, communications and information-sharing differ. One is the social networks of the virtual neighbourhood and the other is the social networks of the physical neighbourhood but the real has the narrower and limited social networks of the people, while the virtual has a much wider and unlimited social networks and groups of the people in which the Net provides the opportunity to increase diverse networked communities. In spite of the difference in the real life interactions and the virtual life interactions, there is some kind of compromise and give-and-take relationship (trade-off) between the two to interact and strengthen each other (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). The virtual community shares some of the features of the real or non-computer-mediated communities and vice-versa. The changes have brought the two communities closer to each other to interact and affect the lives of the people (real life and the virtual life) and the culturality and the identity of those engaged with real and virtual platforms of social interactions and information-sharing.

The Real Community, its Artefacts and the Identity of those Engaged with the Community's Platform for Social Interactions and Information-sharing

The real community is not like virtual community because the virtual is symbolic while the real is actual. The real exists at the physical space with an off-line face-to-face embodied mode of interaction and communication while the virtual exists at the cyberspace with an on-line disembodied mode of interaction and communication. The real community is spatial, located at the physical space. It is largely based

on shared social characteristics and shared, common and collective interests than the shared individual interests (Ellis,2004). The social factors and shared interests bind the people together into groups. The social factors like the ethnic, racial, caste, class, age, gender, language, region, religion and skills are some of the factors which bind the people together into the groups, such as, the tribal and the non-tribal groups like the groups or the communities of various lower and higher categories of professionals/skilled workers, groups of academicians, researchers and the artists, communities of artisans, peasants, factory and office workers, semi and unskilled workers and various regional, linguistic and religious groups and similar other age and gender-based groups and rural and urban communities, etc. There are multiple social factors and multiple real communities. All such indigenous groups exist on the physical space in Indian and in other societies. They are formally and informally organised groups of off-line, face-to-face and embodied social interactions, communication and information-sharing among their members. The social ties, we-feeling, physical and cultural boundaries among them are very strong as compared to the virtual, on-line, disembodied and symbolic interactions and communication. The real community (s) with its off-line mode of communication and face-to-face interactions is an old established tradition, functioning with greater degree of precision in human contacts in an organised and structured physical setting. On the other hand, the virtual community (s) with its on-line contactless, spaceless, boundryless mode is a relatively new tradition of communication, created by the information technology. There is a gradual shift from the real off-line paradigm to the new on-line paradigm, although they co-exist with some degree of overlap between the norms, traits or the artefacts of the two paradigms.

The norms or the characteristic features of the real community are the abstractions of the social characteristics which bind the people together into groups. These norms are the following: (1) constant engagement of the members in the activities of the real community at the physical space,(2) regular attendance at the spatial work place,(3) necessary competence, skills and knowledge required for better work performance,(4) willingness needed to invest time, energy and efforts in various work activities of the community,(5) commitment to the off-line face-to-face interactions and information-sharing,(6) maintenance of social solidarity and the consciousness of kind among the members,(7) emotional attachment with the physical space, cultural

traits, language and the people engaged with the activities of the community,(8) common sense of identity, a sense of belonging and well-feeling among the members,(9) shared collective interest and shared lifestyle, values, practices and affinities, and (10) the behaviour, attitude, temperament and the viewpoint, specific to the requirements of the real communities. These are some of the norms, traits, features, attributes or the artefacts or the requirements of the real community. They have to be adhered, obeyed, internalised, produced and reproduced to establish the identity of the members as, for example, tribal, professional, academician, researcher, artist, technician, craftsman, peasants, welder, mason, carpenter, etc. All the artefacts of the real community are the physical constructs and they originate from the nature of the real community itself (Poster,1998). They are empowered to harmonize the real communities within and between them and integrate them into the organic structure of the larger society to make the society a coherent and a well-knit system. As a result, the pre-computer and pre-modern conventional societies remained intact for centuries but now they are disturbed by modern and post-modern developments, mainly because of the introduction of the new technology which is making them disintegrated, divided, faction-ridden, crisis-oriented, tension-prone, imagined and risk societies. The new technology is degenerating them in the name of modernizing them, although the new technology has created so much fascination, craze and addiction that everybody is drawn into it. It is changing the physical space community into physically spaceless imagined community, located in the cyberspace which is a space imaginatively constructed by symbolic processes initiated by the individuals themselves who are virtually present but physical absent as against the real community (Jones,1998).

The Virtual Community, its Artefacts, its Functional Strategy and the Identity of those Engaged with the Community's Platform for Social Interactions and Information-sharing

The physical and the virtual platforms are entirely different from each other because one exists in reality with physically created sociability and the other exists in imagination with virtually created sociability. The virtual is an imagined community in which there is no emotional attachment with the community. There is an engagement only with the medium (Internet/computer-mediated tool or the digital

devices of communication), media platform and the on-line interactions and communication. Those engaged with the medium, construct their own virtual community imaginatively through the symbolic processes for interactions and information-sharing. The virtual community constructed by them is characterised by the features, specific to the cyberculture (Benedikt, 1991). These features or the norms are the following: (1) constant engagement of the members or the net-users with the medium and with specific media platform, (2) regular attendance at the media platform and at the place of digital devices, (3) necessary competence, skills and special practical knowledge in the operation of the digital devices, and in organizing and describing the digital data, (4) high motivation and dedication, showing willingness to invest time, energy and efforts to generate content/information/messages for on-line discourses, discussions, interactions, responses, feedback and information-sharing among the net-users, (5) commitment and a sense of belonging to the virtual mode of communication and interactions, (6) behaviour, habit, attitude, values and temperament, specific to the cyberculture, (7) acceptance of and a firm belief into these features or norms or the rules of the game, (8) serious adherence and obedience to and the reproduction of the rules of the game. These are some of the features or the artefacts of the virtual community or of the Internet-culture or the cyber-culture (Jorissen, 2003 and Smith, 1999). These features are the virtual constructs. The obedience to the artefacts, their production and reproduction is the necessary condition to make the members of the virtual community an effective and active member partners. Bourdieu (1993) defines the artefacts of the virtual community as '*doxa*', the 'rules of the game' and 'being-in-the-game' as '*illusion*'. If a person who wants to be attached with the medium or the game, he or she has to accept the rules with firm belief into them in order to 'be-in-the game' on regular basis. Thus, the membership of the virtual community becomes a complex process because one has to fulfil the rule requirements of the virtual community. Therefore, the membership is complex, as well as, conditional.

The membership is complex and conditional because one cannot directly and immediately interact and communicate through the media platform because the Internet is not a direct medium like the off-line face-to-face interaction at the physical space of the real community. In the on-line mode, communication is not possible immediately. It is possible only after the person transforms himself into *persona* to express himself symbolically or virtually. In the real community, the off-line

mode functions directly in human contacts in an organised and structured physical setting while the on-line mode is an indirect contactless mode which transcends physical and cultural boundaries. It can take place anywhere at any place where the functional requirement of digital devices are available. Its functional process can be seen virtually only on the screen through the symbolic expressions, signs, images and *personae*. The on-line mode of the virtual community is like the transmission mode in which, not physical but virtual presence is needed. This is a kind of disembodied communication, taking place through imagined signs and images beamed on the screen (Jones, 1997, Smith & Kollock, 1999). The virtual mode cannot be understood in the same way as the personal interactions, taking place in close human contacts in the real community because in the Net, the involved persons cannot act and interact unless they transform themselves into *personae*, into symbolic expressions or into signs and images through which they can communicate and interact among themselves and with others to share information. There is no person-to-person contact and face-to-face interaction as it is a contactless mode. The contact among the net-users of the imagined community can take place only virtually through codified artefacts, *personae*, signs, images or symbolic structures on the screen (Anderson, 1993).

There is no direct contact with the creators of the *personae* or the images (simulated identity, looking alike but not genuine) and the interactions takes place only through the *personae* or the images of the persons behind the *personae* or the images. There is direct relationship between the person and his *persona* (simulated identity) or image but there is no direct relationship between persons to persons and face-to-face interaction as it happens in the real community. In the virtual community, there is indirect relationship between *personae* of the persons involved who are physically absent on the screen and it is only their simulated identity (*Personae*) or digital shadow-identity of the real person speaks out and enacts on the screen. The on-line communication and interactions in the virtual community is like shadow-play or shadow act, considered to represent the true profile of the real persons. The shadows act immediately by means of bodies they belong to. It is through the shadows, *personae*, images, simulated identity or symbolic expressions; an imagined community is created in the cyberspace. The communication, transmission, interactions and information-sharing through them are lively and interesting. It is through them, the Net spreads its wings all over the world and becomes globally accessible.

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The image-identity of the persons engaged with the medium is created in the cyberspace by the net-users themselves and not by any other persons. It is created on the basis of person's own imagination about himself. This identity is the transformed *persona* (Jorissen, 2001). Similarly, other persons exposed to the *persona* just appear on the screen and act and interact in terms their own *personae*. In this way, the on-line communication becomes a network of interactions among the *personae* or virtually created symbolic identities. Thus, the Internet connected computer-mediated communication, interactions and information-sharing at the cyberspace becomes a game type activity, beneficial to the members of the cyber community. Therefore, the persons try to 'be-in-the-game' (*illusion*) to get multiple benefits (informational, social, recreational, economic, commercial, etc.) from the virtual community for personal satisfaction and gratification (Roy, 2008) but the membership of 'being-in-the-game' is not so simple because one has to fulfil the rules (*doxa*) or the requirements of the game. And therefore, the desiring persons to 'get-into- the-game' must be richer in information and technical know-how of the digital devices of information technology because the membership is not as simple as the membership of the real community.

The Real and the Virtual Communities, their Interactions and the Transformation of Identity of the Members

The changes have brought the real and the virtual communities closer to each other but in spite of some commonalities between the two communities, they basically differ from each other in terms of spaces (real v/s virtual) and the modes (off-line v/s on-line) of communication. These two differences make a lot of difference, not only in terms of the artefacts and the identity but also in terms of their relative importance. The virtual mode is relatively more powerful and vibrant mode of storage of information and communication. It is so powerful that the entice stock of the text materials or available information in libraries can be stored into the ken of the computer apparatus for communication and information-sharing among the net-users and the learners. However, the closeness between the two communities is reflected into a continuous exchange of spaces and the modes. In fact, the real community provides the basic human infrastructures to the virtual community because the same members of the real community become members of the virtual community. The entry of the virtual into the real has promoted a shifting relationships between the two communities from the physical state of off-line mode of interactions and information-

sharing among the members to the virtual state of on-line mode among the members. This shift in the spaces and the modes has give rise to double membership and double identities because the members have to internalise and reproduce the rules (features/artefacts) of the double games: the real and the virtual. Accordingly, their attitudinal and behavioural changes take place and the formation of double identity, pertaining to the real and the off-line, as well as, the virtual and the on-line communities. For example, when the persons as members of the real community use the off-line mode in a face-to-face situation of interactions and information-sharing, they are bound by the rules or the artefacts, specific to the real community. They have to internalise those rules to behave and respond accordingly in order to be effective in the promotion of effective reality of off-line sociability, interactions and information-sharing at the physical space. This is one type of identity, spatial in character. Similarly, if the persons as members of the virtual community use the Net at the virtual space for the on-line interactions and information-sharing, they are bound by the rules of the game or the artefacts of the virtual community, specific to the Net-culture or to the cyber-culture. They have to internalise them to behave and respond accordingly in order to be effective in the promotion of effective virtuality of the on-line sociability, interactions and information-sharing at the virtual space. This is another type of identity, virtual in character. The double identities are not dichotomous in character. They overlap and reinforce each other because the rules or the artefacts, specific to the culture of the spatial or real community and the rules or the artefacts, specific to the Internet culture or to the culture of the virtual community are generative, continuously produced and reproduced.

However, the membership of the real community is rather fixed but the membership of the virtual community is flexible and open as this community is open textured, disembodied and imagined community, formed on the Internet when sufficient number of people come together to form the webs of interpersonal relationships in the cyberspace to carry on the discourses through the codified artefacts of the Internet with reference to the generated texts of messages to share information and understanding (Jones,1997 and Smith & Kollock,1999). This is not the case in the spatial or the real community which facilitates sharing of information through the off-line mode at the physical space in a face-to-face interactions of embodied communication (Wellman, 2001). This is the real, off-line and embodied

community as compared to artificial, virtual, disembodied and imagined community. Their purpose is common: interpersonal relationships and information-sharing but these functions are performed in a relatively much broader fashion by the virtual community through the Internet-aided digital devices. As a result, the real community tends to shrink under the impact while the virtual community tends to expand.

The interactive and information-sharing functions are simple in the real community than being complex in the virtual community. This makes the individual identity differ from simple to complex. The off-line cultural identity is simple because there is simple functional strategy and simple traits of the real community to be internalised and reproduced to behave accordingly as compared to the virtual community in which both the functional strategy and the rules of the game are complex to adopt, internalize and reproduce to behave accordingly. The on-line cultural identity is complex because of a complex process of the emergence of the alternative lifestyle which develops when the net-users adopt, internalize, follow, obey, produce and reproduce the rules of the virtual game. The adherence and the obedience to the rule by the net-users appear on the screen, in the physical absence of the users in the form their *personae* engaged with the medium and governed by the rules. This results into an alternative lifestyle being seen on the screen (Turkle, 1995). Not only an alternative lifestyle that develops but also the whole family life is changed into a digital home (Anderson, 1999) belonging to a technician, media person, professional like the software engineer, researcher, academician, and similar other professional groups of skilled persons in the operation of digital devices and engaged with various media platforms. The net-users share the rules of the game and follow the functional strategy of the game that differentiates them from others in the society. They form the special type of group with a sense of belonging, sociability and social identity of their own, increasingly dominated by the virtual realities (Castells, 2001, Rheingold, 1994, Turkle, 1995 and Mitra, 1998). That group emerges from the Net with different culturality, social identity, values, attitude and behaviour as compared with the members of the real communities which are identifiable by their spatial and cultural traits or the artefacts. They are off-line, face-to-face personalised communities with close interpersonal networks of relationships. They are the network communities but physically, basically characterised by shared collective values, interests and belonging and affinity; shared spatial and cultural boundaries; shared attitude, behaviour, belief, rituals, customs,

tradition and language; and shared social solidarity, culturality, identity and identity markers. In such a community, the membership is simple, stable and fixed, and the sociability is constructed around the collective interests and values. Contrast to this, the membership of the on-line spaceless community is complex but flexible and open. The net-users may easily change the media platform, depending on their personal interests. This flexibility makes the virtual community fragile, instable and ephemeral in character but continuous dropping, grouping and regrouping restores stability of the community (Fernback, 1998). The shared interests and values are common around which both the communities are formed but in the real community, largely the collective interests and in the virtual, largely the individual interests are served through the networks of interactions and information-sharing among the members. In this way, collectivism in one and the individualism in the other is focused (Castells, 2001).

However, as we have said before, changes have brought the two communities closer to each other to interact, although they differ from each other in terms of spaces and the modes. This difference makes a lot of difference in terms of how they function and get organised (Wellman, 2001). In the on-line community, the grouping of persons and their networks of interactions are relatively much larger. Since, this community has entered into the physical space of the real community, the character of the later has undergone drastic change but this does not mean that the real community is dissolved or reduced. They co-exist but the entry of the cyberspace into the real space has made the real community largely virtual but the off-line mode at the physical space continues to exist, partly because it is context-specific with its traditional backing, and partly because it is suitable, transparent, real and effective. Since, the virtual mode has entered into the real mode, a kind of mixed modes or hybrid of on-line and the off-line modes and a kind of mixed spaces or the hybrid of virtual and the real spaces have emerged. These two spaces and the modes have their own merits, as well as, demerits but they influence each other, giving rise to a new pattern of social interactions and sociability, new life style and a new form of social organization in which both the networks operate simultaneously (Haq , 2021). India is a good example where both the spaces and the modes are existing together to facilitate communication and information-sharing. The real communities, particularly the academic community has adopted the internet connected computer-mediated flexible and powerful mode, although

both the modes exist and remain organised around the shared collective, as well as, the individual interests and values. The members of the academic community as a real community may also join the on-line media platforms (like social media, facebook, instagram, twitter, snapchat, or Indian Network, Usenet, etc), construct and reconstruct their own social interactions based on their own individual interests. Such a trend is gradually giving rise to individualism among them within the collective ethos of the academic community. The network collectivism as the dominant form of sociability in the academic community is being diluted with the emerging network individualism or the individualised networking as the dominant form of sociability among the members of the community, resulting into greater flexibility of views, and of attending offices as per their choice, weakening of social ties and personal interactions, growing self-esteem and self-perception of being superior to other fellow members of the community, leading a closed isolated life almost cut-off from the public life, degeneration of collective norms for the sake of individualised interests, more interested in reconstructing global ties for personal gains through the on-line networking, etc. These are some of the adverse impact of the Internet on the academic community in particular, although the impact makes the horizon of the community much wider, richer and knowledgeable because of the global accessibility of the Net. Similarly, there are many other real or physical communities which are directly or indirectly affected by the digital devices. Their homes and the work places are partly, if not totally, digitalised. In almost every home of the real communities, at least, computer, digital TV, e-mail and mobile connectivity are available, even if the members of the real communities are not members of the virtual communities but they are exposed to the faster modes of electronic communication to share information at the wider level. The phenomenal impact of the virtual over the real communities makes the virtual to have an edge over the real community (s), although the real provides the basic ground for the virtual to take-off and become a global phenomenon. In this phenomenon, what is being done today, is the change of the world virtually into the network society (Castells, 2001 and Barlow, 1995).

Concluding Remarks

The paper is part of a larger paper, entitled “Computer-mediated Communication, Formation of Virtual Communities and the Transformation of Culturality and Identity”. One of the components of the larger paper is retained into this paper with an attempt to examine

the interaction and the interface between the real and the virtual communities and the transformation of identity of their members. The paper first defines the real and the virtual communities and their functional strategies separately, and then combines them to examine as to how they interact, exchange their spaces and the modes, communicate and share information and how their interaction is giving rise to a new hybridised mode of interaction and information-sharing. The real communities are physical, spatial and stable communities with their own established traditions, stronger social ties, off-line face-to-face social contacts and sociability while the virtual communities are imagined, physically spaceless, flexible and ephemeral, with a relatively new tradition of its own, weak social ties, on-line contactless interaction and virtual in character. The merits and the demerits of the two paces and the modes have given rise to a mixed (hybridised) interface and a new pattern of interaction, information-sharing and sociability among them. However, the virtual with its relatively much broader global networks has an edge over the real but the real provides the basic ground for the virtual to take-off and become a global phenomenon.

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