

## Digital Masks: Analyzing The Discrepancies Between Social Media Personality And Real-Life Personality In Students

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### ABSTRACT

The introduction of social media has changed the way people present themselves to the world. Social media platforms have provided a different identity to people irrespective of their age. Social media involvement of individuals begins as soon as they start understanding the virtual networks and the way the connections behave. Especially when it comes to students, it is very important to understand the way they present themselves on social media platforms. Their behavior in the real world and the virtual world will be driven by the personalities they carry. This study is to examine the differences in the personalities projected by students on social media and real life. This research is based on an assumption that students' presence on social media can be masked and a huge difference in their personalities and behavior can be observed in social media platforms and real life. Understanding the digital masks is critical for understanding the impact online personas have on students' lives. The digital masks can impact student's self-perception, their interpersonal relations as well as their mental health. This study goals include identifying the personality traits portrayed by students in social media vs their real life personality traits.

This methodology includes a diverse sample of undergraduate and graduate students and collecting quantitative data using online surveys of 230 students. Through the responses received from participants, it would be easier to identify the differences in their real life personality traits and the personality traits portrayed on the social media. Ethical considerations are taken into account while collecting data and the confidentiality is assured to the participants. Eventually, this study aims to identify the complexities of digital masks if any, present among students and reveal their real life personality traits in the digital age.

Review of literature is carried out to explore the existing theoretical frameworks that reinforce the existing research, and present the methodology for examining the gap between social media personalities and real-life personalities in the student population. This study also aims to contribute valuable insights for broadening discourse on the role of social media in defining the digital personalities of the students.

**KEY WORDS:** Digital Mask, Real life personality, Social Media Personality, Students

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has considerably changed the manner in which people present themselves to the world. Social media platforms have offered exclusive prospects for expressing one-self and managing one's impressions. Students are no exception to this digital era and the social media platforms. The virtual space available for creatively crafting one's persona is found very lucrative. The concept of "Digital Masks" has been strengthened with the increased indulgence of people in portraying themselves on social platforms and the seeking validation for their online identity. This can be considered as a complex inter-play between the need of expressions and the need to construct one's social identity.

This study aims to investigate into the differences if any between the social media personalities and the real-life personalities, more specifically for the demographics of students. The dichotomy between the social-media and the real-life personalities of students may seem fascinating and a part of modern student's life, but at the same time can be alarming. Students are involved in navigating various challenges posed by educational and career responsibilities. At the same time, they are also involved in managing the complexities of projecting themselves in real life and in virtual life.

The real-life personality is formed by various factors such as the student's educational experience, the relationships with

peer, personal beliefs and values, family dynamics etc. Student's personality traits in real life encompasses the attitude and behavior that gets displayed in the classrooms, campus life, day-to-day interactions with teachers and peer. These real life interactions play very important role in shaping and developing various skills among students. Through the daily exchanges and interfaces students develop their interpersonal skills, their relationships with peer and the sense of belongingness with others in educational setups.

On the other hand, the social media personality of students is shaped in the virtual world, where they create an online identity through social media networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads etc. Such online social media platforms are used often by students for a selective portrayal of the happenings in their lives by stressing the experiences and achievements, and by ensuring that the same are in line-up with the trends of digital aesthetics. The online persona becomes an image for self-expression for students and a medium to connect with people beyond physical boundaries. It also serves as a platform for exploring one's identity in the virtual space.

As the virtual landscape expands, the question that becomes a prime importance is to identify how real-life and online personas deviate from each other. This study aims to analyze the discrepancies between the personalities students project on social media platforms and their personalities in real- life. By inspecting these inconsistencies, we can work on adopting proactive measures for achieving the balance between the digital and real-life identities of students. Recognizing the complexities of this digital dichotomy is vital, particularly when recognizing the extensive influence of social media on shaping the personality of individuals.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the early studies was conducted by Sarah Thompson (2017) on identifying the "Digital Duality: An Examination of Social Media Persona and Authenticity in a Cross-Cultural Context". Sarah conducted a cross-cultural study involving students from different countries, employing surveys and cultural psychology frameworks. The results of this study indicated cultural variations in the adoption of digital masks, emphasizing the need for context-specific analyses in understanding online behaviors.

David Williams (2018) attempted to study a research titled "Behind the Screen: Investigating the Psychological Discrepancies in Digital Self-Portrayal among University Students" using a mixed- methods approach which involved content analysis of social media posts and face-to-face psychological assessments of 150 students. He observed that students tend to display more extroverted and socially desirable traits online, indicating the existence of digital masks for social approval.

The study conducted by Angela Davis (2019) on "Filtering Reality: An Exploration of the Impact of Instagram Filters on Perceived Personality Traits among College Students" analyzed Instagram posts of 250 students, focusing on identifying the correlation between filter usage and the traits attributed by viewers. The findings of this research revealed an alteration in personality perception based on filter choices, emphasizing the role of visual elements in the construction of digital masks.

Jessica Martinez (2019) also conducted a research on "Persona Projection: A Longitudinal Study of Social Media Identity Evolution in High School and College Students". The researcher tracked the online behaviors of 200 students over a two-year period, combining quantitative analysis of posts with qualitative interviews. The findings revealed a dynamic shift in online personas over time, suggesting that digital masks are not static but evolve with personal development and societal influences.

Further a researcher Oliva Carter (2020) carried out a research on "Twitter Tales: Investigating the Narrative Discrepancies in Self-Expression among College Students", and employed a narrative analysis approach to examine the language and themes in the tweets of 300 students, complemented by interviews. The research findings uncovered a tendency for students to craft specific online narratives divergent from their real-life experiences, indicating the use of digital masks for storytelling.

Study carried out by Emily Johnson (2020) on the title "Unmasking the Online Persona: A Comparative Study of Social Media and Real-Life Traits in College Students" involved a survey and in-depth interviews with 300 college students, utilizing psychological assessments to measure personality traits. The research findings show a significant misalignment between self-reported online personalities and real-life behaviors, highlighting the impact of social media on self-presentation.

Daniel Smith (2021) conducted a research on "Virtual Reality and Authenticity: An Experimental Study on the Impact of Immersive Environments on Online Self-Presentation". He utilized virtual reality simulations to observe the behavior of 100 students in controlled digital environments, comparing it with their real-world interactions. The findings confirmed a heightened discrepancy in self-presentation in virtual reality, suggesting that immersive online experiences amplify the use of digital masks.

Michael Chang (2021) carried out a research on "Snapshots and Reality: Exploring the Discrepancies in Self-Presentation on Snapchat among Undergraduate Students", by analyzing 500 Snapchat stories and conducting follow-up interviews to understand the motivations behind the creation of ephemeral online personas. He discovered a pronounced discrepancy between Snapchat content and real-life experiences, indicating a performative aspect to digital self-presentation.

Further on of the latest study conducted by Brian Mitchell (2022) on identifying the Influence of Social Media on Self-Perception: A Comparative Study among High School Students, combined the self-report surveys, peer evaluations, and behavioral observations to assess the alignment between perceived and actual personalities. The study findings highlighted an inconsistency between self-perception and external observations, indicating the role of digital masks in

shaping individuals' views of themselves.

### **3. RESEARCH GAP**

While previous research has addressed the psychological aspects of social media, this study filled the gap by focusing on specific differences in students' online and offline personas. The expected results could inform interventions that promote healthy online behavior, self-awareness, and strategies for balancing online and offline identities.

### **4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- 1) To analyze the discrepancies between social media personality and real life personality of students.
- 2) To study the impact of demographic variables on social media personality and real life personality of students.

### **5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this study is a blend of primary and secondary methods. To identify the key issues, a systematic literature review has been done however, to validate the literature, a few questions were asked to the 230 individuals belonging to the age of 15 to more than 23 years. These questions were having Likert's scale options. In general, the objective was to identify the impact of digital masks on student's self-perceptions, their interpersonal relations and their mental health. Further, based on the survey, an analyze the discrepancies between social media personality and real life personality in students.

### **6. DATA ANALYSIS**

Data collected through online mode will be subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis for testing the objectives under hypothesis consideration. Descriptive analysis will include computation of Mean, Standard deviation, Percentage and Frequency distribution. For inferential analysis paired sample t-test is carried out.

### **7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited to understanding the social media and real life personalities of students. It is not carried out for other diverse groups of respondents.

### **8. DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected was analyzed using SPSS software for descriptive and inferential statistics.

## **DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

### **Average Hours Spent by Students on Social Media**

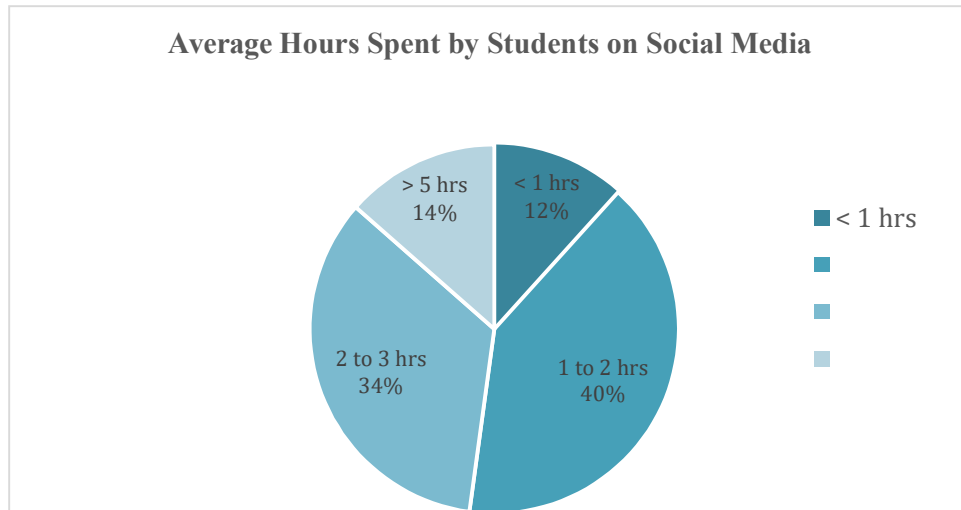


Figure 1.1 indicates the average hours spent by students on social media platforms.

It is observed that the hours spent by maximum students (40%) on using the social media are from one to two hours.

### Social Media Platforms Used by Students

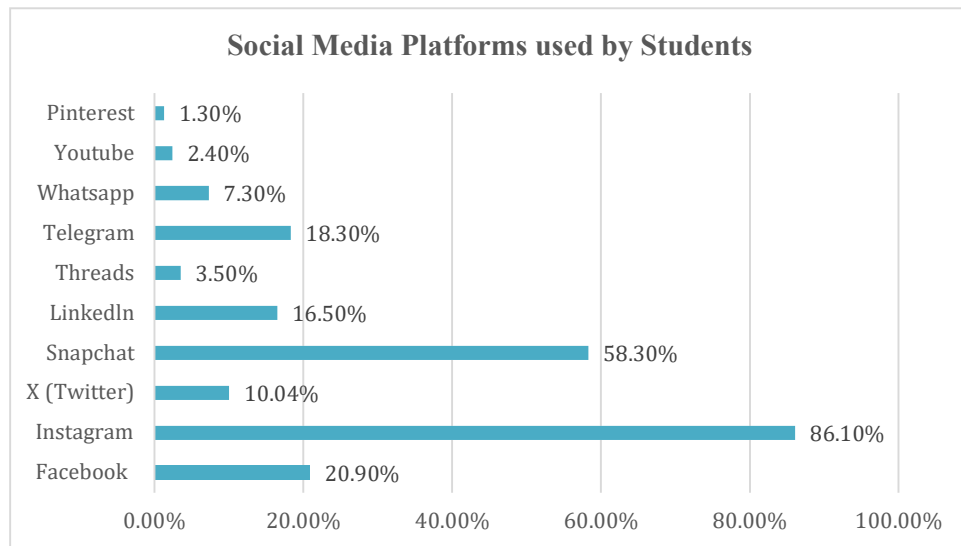


Figure 1.2 indicates the social media platforms used by students.

It is observed that maximum involvement of students on social media platform is in using Instagram followed by Snapchat (58%).

### Content Shared by Students on Social Media

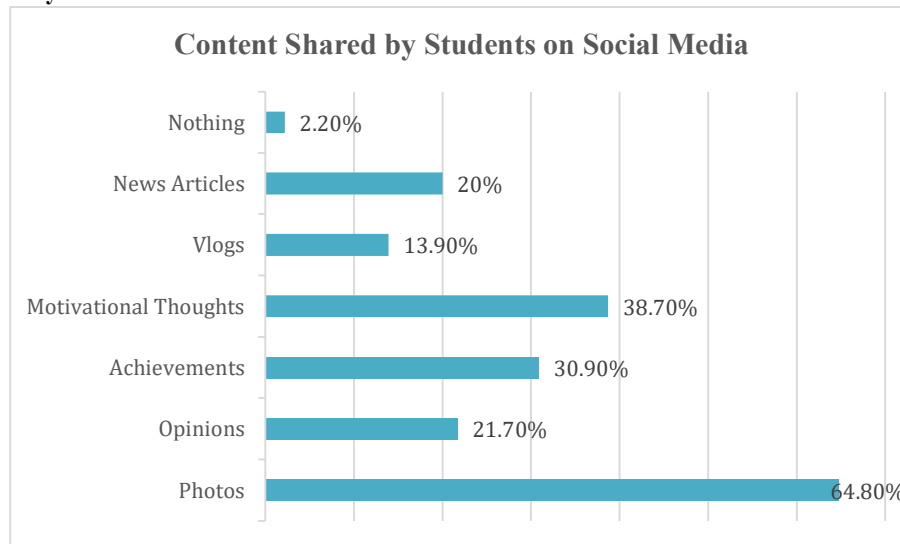


Figure 1.3 indicates the content shared by students on social media.

It is observed that maximum shares done by students are photos (64%) followed by motivational thoughts (38%). This reaffirms the assumption of study that the need of self-expression is so high among students that they believe in sharing their photos and thoughts through social media platforms.

### Reasons for Using Social Media

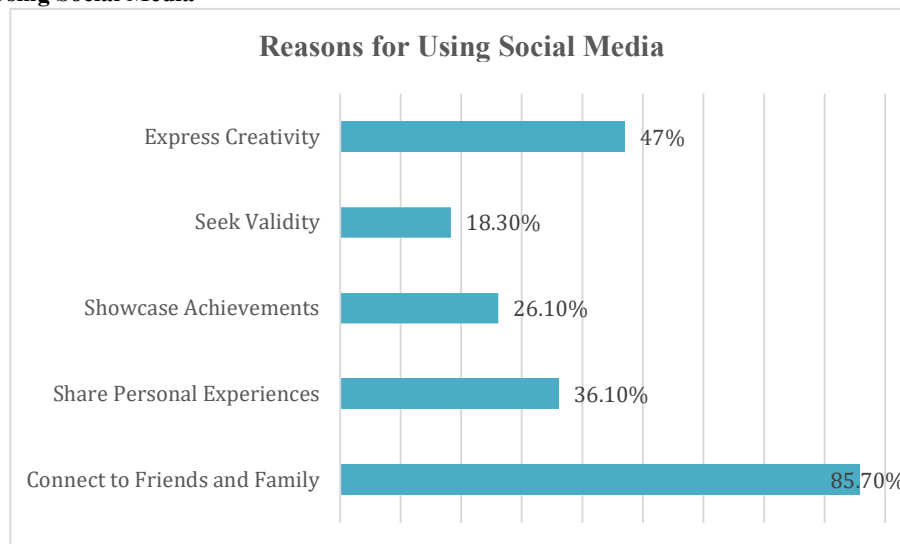


Figure 1.4 indicates the reasons given by students to use social media.

It is observed that the prime reason which motivates students to use social media is the need to connect and remain connected to their friends and family on social media followed by the need of expressing creatively to others for getting attention and gaining appreciation.

Reasons for Portraying oneself on Social Media

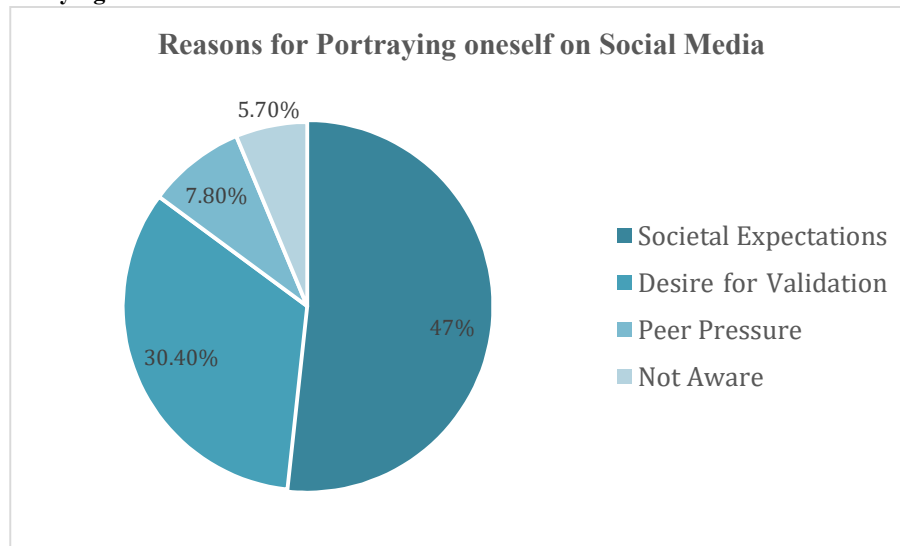


Figure 1.5 indicates the reasons provided by students for portraying oneself on Social Media.

It is observed that the main reason for portraying oneself on social media is the perceived societal expectations to be visible on social media followed by the desire for validation among students.

INFERENTIAL STATISTICS

Identification of difference in Social Media Personality and Real Life Personalities of students:

Paired sample t-test was used to identify the difference between Real Life Personality and Life in Social Media on OCEAN traits.

Table 1.1 indicates the descriptive statistics Mean, Frequency and SD of OCEAN traits observed in Real Life Personality and Social Media Personality.

Paired Samples Statistics		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pair 1	Openness to Experience – Real Life	3.731	230	.8446	.0557
	Openness to Experience – Life in Social Media	2.897	230	.8990	.0593
Pair 2	Conscientiousness – Real Life	3.746	230	.9027	.0595
	Conscientiousness – Life in Social Media	3.183	230	.9127	.0602
Pair 3	Extroversion – Real Life	3.817	230	.9116	.0601
	Extroversion – Life in Social Media	2.931	230	.9810	.0647
Pair 4	Agreeableness – Real Life	3.546	230	.9320	.0615
	Agreeableness – Life in Social Media	3.437	230	1.0159	.0670
Pair 5	Neuroticism – Real Life	3.371	230	.9564	.0631
	Neuroticism – Life in Social Media	3.103	230	.9703	.0640

Table 1.2 and 1.3 indicate the significance levels in paired samples correlations.

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Openness to Experience – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	230	.470	.000
Pair 2	Conscientiousness – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	230	.396	.000
Pair 3	Extroversion – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	230	.356	.000
Pair 4	Agreeableness – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	230	.630	.000
Pair 5	Neuroticism – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	230	.609	.000

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Openness to Experience – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	.8339	.8991	.0593	.7171	.9507	14.066	229	.000
Pair 2	Conscientiousness – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	.5626	.9981	.0658	.4329	.6923	8.549	229	.000
Pair 3	Extroversion – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	.8852	1.0758	.0709	.7454	1.0250	12.479	229	.000
Pair 4	Agreeableness – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	.1096	.8408	.0554	.0003	.2188	1.976	229	.000
Pair 5	Neuroticism – in Real Life & Life in Social Media	.2687	.8518	.0562	.1580	.3794	4.784	229	.000

- The P Value obtained is **0.000 which is less than 0.05**. This specifies that the **Null Hypothesis is rejected** indicating the existence of difference in OCEAN personality trait in Real Life as well as Life on Social Media of students. This indicates a huge difference in real personality and the portrayed personalities on social media platforms. This is a biggest point of concern which needs to be addressed as wearing digital masks will not shade the real life personality traits. Further investigations should be done for finding the interventions to educate students for promoting a match between real life personalities and social media personalities.

**9. CONCLUSION**

The research indicates that there are notable differences between the personality traits projected on social media platforms and the authentic personalities of individuals in real life. One key finding is the prevalence of digital masks, where students tend to curate and present a selective version of themselves on social media. This selective self-

presentation can lead to a divergence between the perceived personality traits online and the actual characteristics observed in face-to-face interactions. This phenomenon may be influenced by various factors such as social expectations, peer pressure, and the desire for social validation. As society becomes increasingly interconnected through digital platforms, acknowledging and addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering genuine connections and promoting mental well-being among students. The study calls for further research into the long-term effects of maintaining digital masks and the development of strategies to encourage more authentic online interactions. Ultimately, understanding the interplay between social media and real-life personality is essential for creating a balanced and healthy digital social landscape.

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