

# Difference between digital and real personality affecting relationships

Bombay Times, Page 3 - 24th March 2017

## IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUR DIGITAL AND REAL PERSONALITY AFFECTING YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Sutapa.Singha@timesgroup.com

**A** recent study says Indians are pushing back their sleep by over an hour, given their addiction to social media. So, what are all these people really doing online? No rocket science there. They are discovering common interests, making friends, forming relationships and so on. From dating sites to matrimonials, social networking to microblogging, online communication is the norm. True, it's made our life easier and also spread our network. But, how authentic an image of yourself are you putting out there? Do your posts really reflect who you are? Probably not! The difference between your digital personality and your real self is so huge, it is negatively affecting your relationships. Taking a relationship offline, after forming it online, can make or break it. Reason: The person who texted you 'love you' 30 times a day, might not be saying it out loud even once. That's a shocker!

### DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN THE PERSONALITIES IS KEY

According to cyber psychologist Nirali Bhatia, this is an issue that's plaguing new age relationships. And, she does not just attribute this to the growing cyber space, but also to the way Indians are brought up. "Have you ever seen your mom and dad kiss? That's the way we Indians, the current generation, are brought up. It is only natural that there's a huge divide between who we project ourselves to be online and who we really are! It is the story of every household. Your spouse will send you kisses on text messages, but s/he will rarely kiss you in front of people. Those who can differentiate between these two personalities, get on with it. However, when it comes to young people trying to find love, they get easily confused. There's an acute divide that we have not been taught to bridge. Virtual relationships, most of the time,

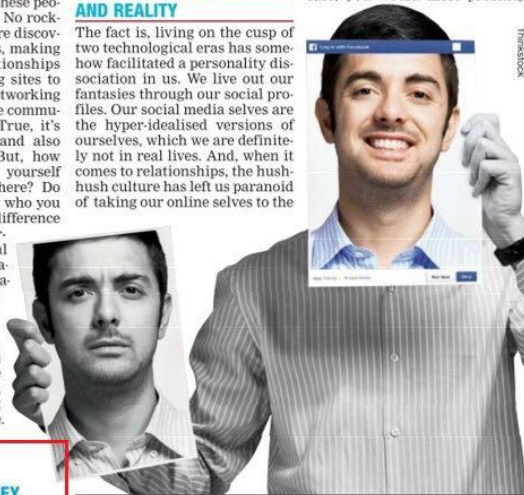
lead us to exaggerated expectations which are often not fulfilled in real life. Thus, relationship issues, stress, depression and anxiety."

### CONFLICT OF EXPECTATION AND REALITY

The fact is, living on the cusp of two technological eras has somehow facilitated a personality dissociation in us. We live out our fantasies through our social profiles. Our social media selves are the hyper-idealised versions of ourselves, which we are definitely not in real lives. And, when it comes to relationships, the hush-hush culture has left us paranoid of taking our online selves to the

### RESPONSE VS REACTION

Face-to-face conversations require reactions. Take, for example, a heated argument. If you are being attacked on your face, you would most probably



THESTOCK

real world and actually acknowledge them! According to psychiatrist Dr Anjali Chhabria, a lot of these issues manifest themselves in long distance relationships. "There's a certain amount of relaxation when you cannot see the person you are talking to. So, couples in long distance relationships, who mostly communicate through chats, emails and even phone conversations, find it really difficult to open up to each other face-to-face. This happens because of a phenomenon called online disinhibition effect, which basically refers to the reduced inhibition when using remote electronic communication. So, the perception they form of the other person online, is in direct conflict with her/his real persona. This causes confusion, misunderstanding, and thus, many relationships die premature deaths," she says.

react the same way, without thinking twice. However, Dr Chhabria explains, when the entire thing happens online, you have time to step back, gauge your own reaction, weigh out the pros and cons and then respond, rather than react. "Online conversations allow both person time and space to measure how and what they put out there about themselves. Naturally, it is a well thought out persona, which is constructed subconsciously, keeping in mind the other person's likes and dislikes," she adds.

### IS THERE A SOLUTION?

According to psychiatrist Dr Pavan Sonar, the only way to deal with this is to meet up, in real life. "Online conversations are fine, but one needs to accept that online personalities project a distorted perception. One must not make any hasty decision, of either accepting or rejecting a person, without meeting in person multiple times."

### THE REASONS

- 1 Lack of accountability:** Internet makes people connect faster, but also on a more superficial level. The lack of accountability, because the other person can not read our expressions, or voice, enables us with the excuse, 'I never meant it that way', and get away with it.
- 2 The urge to experiment:** The digital world is still a realm, in which the definitions of what is right and what is wrong are not spelt out clearly. So, something that might be embarrassing to talk about in the real world, is not so weird when being talked about in that 'safe zone'.
- 3 Distorted portrayal of self:** For Deepshikha Ray, an HR professional, the first experience with a matrimonial site was so bad, it was almost funny. "I met him through a matrimonial site," she says, "and took our conversation to Facebook. Since we lived in two different cities, the first time I could meet him was after four months of chatting online. He was the same guy, but... wait for it... without the hair: That is

when I realised why he would not post any of his recent pictures online. I mean, hair or no hair, I don't care. What bothered me was that he deliberately chose to give a false impression of himself. I ended up laughing at myself." Well, false impression or distorted portrayal, this disconnect between one's real and online self can also be a result of low self esteem. Says Dr Sonar, "The virtual world gives you anonymity and assisted tools to impress others. When people fail to do that on their own accord, they readily make use of them. It makes them feel good. It might not be a conscious decision to deceive others, and yet, they end up doing so in real life."

**4 The lack of physical consequences:** The fact that one can not see the effect of his/her action on the other person, also allays the guilt factor. The internet provides a shield to the users, which protects them from physically encountering the consequences of their actions.

**5 Living out fantasies:** The internet offers people a safe cocoon to live out their fantasies. And how other people feature in those fantasies never get out of the digital realm. Or, so they think.

