Virtues and veracity of the second life

Nityesh Bhatt & Sapna Choradia
November 9, 2011 Last Updated at 00:53 IST

Online communities - like Second Life that offer an alternate world - are gaining popularity not just among the youth but also among adults, businesses, religious organisations ... you name it.

Virtual community is a virtual space providing technology-mediated communication to perform a wide gamut of activities like building relationships, entertaining people, exchanging information, thoughts and knowledge, performing business activities and facilitating studies. Howard Rheingold (1995) defined virtual community as "social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in the cyberspace". Later, the concept was defined from a multi-disciplinary perspective, ranging from social, technological, business and economic viewpoint.

Millions of users across the world log into their Facebook account religiously and follow the discussion thread, post comments, upload pictures, play games and wish their friends on special days. Almost a similar number of professionals follow LinkedIn from the start of their day. MySpace, Orkut, Skype and many such online communities attract a large number of users everyday and are growing exponentially. The emergence of 3D communities like SecondLife, SmallWorlds, ActiveWorlds etc has given a Midas touch to the community era. The success of these online communities can be attributed to both associated benefits as well as emotional attachment among its users.

Today, with this incessantly updating technological era, these virtual communities have become an integral part of living for the growing generation. Following this dynamic trend, one can observe a significant shift in the social, political, economic and regulatory environment across the globe. On the basis of this advancement, Humphrys (2008) defines virtual world as a space where people not only communicate but also create an alternative (single/multiple) identity. Researchers believe that by 2020, the growth of virtual world will be similar to the world wide web and it will soon replace the web browser, changing the way we interact on the internet (Rawlinson 2007; Sarvary 2008).

De Nood and Attema (2006) believe that the concept of a virtual world is as old as that of humans dreaming. Several novels, plays and movies represent the idea of an imaginary world (Greto 2008). One can identify significantly large number of users on the internet spending most of their time in online gaming, interaction and work activities as compared to the real life (Hof