A community is a group of people living in a same place and having something in common. The communities which sprang up online are virtual communities. Sometimes a group of people who do some common job gets together to discuss and learn from each other. Such communities in which the discussion revolves around some particular job or practice is known as a community of practice (CoP). And just like communities, CoPs also emerged online supported by technology, and these CoPs came to be known as virtual communities of practice. It is an informal network of people engaged in a particular profession, occupation, or job function that actively seeks to work more effectively and to understand their work more fully. Members share their practical knowledge and information with other members by helping each other perform better.

The success of VCoPs depends critically on the contribution of their members, which in turn depends on the strength of relationships between them. The primary objective of any virtual community is knowledge sharing. There are certain important factors which come in to play in a social environment like a VCoP which influence knowledge sharing. Social capital theory is used in this study to explore how the factors like trust, reciprocity, identification, shared language and shared vision impacts knowledge sharing in VCoPs. To guarantee success and perpetuation of a VCoP, it must be promoted by its members. This study deepens and extends prior research by conceptualizing contributions in VCoPs as a social activity. The aim of this study is to uncover the importance of social capital factors for knowledge sharing and community promotion in a sponsored VCoP.
A questionnaire was developed for collecting data from the members of various VCoPs. Before proceeding to the main study, the questionnaire was validated using a pilot study. A trial sample was collected and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was done to check whether the items load on the factors as expected from theory. After confirming it, for the main study, data was collected from members of VCoPs which are sponsored by 425 companies across 10 industries (Automobile: 4, Agriculture: 21, Education: 22, Retail: 11, FMCG: 58, Logistics: 33, Pharmaceutical: 181, Consultancy: 15, BPO/KPO: 72 and Banking: 8) in Hyderabad, India. Stratified sampling based on industry was done from the companies of this list and an equal allocation of four companies was done from each stratum or industry. Data was collected in Hyderabad with the help of a Hyderabad based market research firm, and 373 usable responses were received, on which data analysis was performed.

The demographic profiles of the respondents which includes, age, gender, experience and duration of membership in VCoPs were systematically analyzed. The descriptive statistics of all the items were also analyzed and reported, showing the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis. Three approaches for data analysis were used in this study namely, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to check the underlying factor structure and the suitability of data for factor analysis. CFA was used to check the goodness of model fit and to analyze the measurement model. It was also used to establish the construct reliability and validity. Finally SEM with path analysis was used to confirm the relationship between the factors of social capital factors and knowledge sharing and the relationship between knowledge sharing and community promotion.
The results showed that knowledge collection and donation have a strong influence on community promotion. A positive significant relationship between knowledge donation and knowledge collection was also present. The social capital factors of trust, shared language and shared vision positively influenced knowledge donation, but only shared vision was seen to influence knowledge collection. Of the three hypothesized antecedents to trust, only social interaction had a significant positive effect on trust.

This research will contribute to the existing body of literature and will also help practitioners understand the factors which influence community promotion and knowledge sharing within communities.

**Keywords:** Knowledge management, Social capital, Virtual communities of practice, Knowledge sharing, Community promotion.