

Online Self-Presentation and Self-Concept Clarity among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms serve as primary locations through which people create and share their personal identities. The study investigated how social media affects young adults' online self-presentation and identity development. The research used a quantitative cross-sectional design to study 150 participants who were between 13 and 30 years old. The researchers applied descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, independent samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA to their data analysis. The results showed that ideal self-multiple selves and consistent self-showed strong positive connections with online presentation and self-concept. The regression analysis showed that online presentation and multiple selves and ideal self-explained self-concept development. The study found that gender and group differences did not show any significant statistical differences. The study demonstrates how young people increasingly use online spaces to develop their personal identities.

Keywords: *Online Self-Presentation, Self-Concept Clarity, Social Media*

Online self-presentation refers to the strategic management of digital identity across social networking platforms. Self-concept clarity refers to the extent to which self-beliefs are clearly defined, internally consistent, and stable over time. The present study explores the relationship between these psychological constructs among young adults. Social media platforms have changed how people build social connections and express themselves to others in recent times. Users of Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn platforms can show their personal images to a wide audience through the platforms. People create their actual public image through their use of photos and captions and stories and their social media engagement.

The process of identity development reaches its peak in the years between adolescence and early adulthood. Young people go through various experiences to find out who they really are while testing different beliefs and values systems. Social media platforms provide users with virtual spaces which enable them to explore their identities throughout the day. People who meet face to face different self-presentation challenges than people who interact through online platforms.

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Received: March 08, 2026; Revision Received: March 27, 2026; Accepted: March 31, 2026

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People have the ability to modify their pictures and choose which parts of their existence to showcase while they build their social presence. The available options enable people to express themselves creatively but these options create higher social comparison standards which drive people to seek perfect social identities.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses three fundamental psychological concepts as its foundation.

- Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory explains that adolescents and emerging adults need to undergo identity development through various life experiences. Social media provides an extended environment for this developmental process.
- According to Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory people use social situations to create specific images of themselves. Users on social media create and display their selected identities through their online activities.
- Higgins' Self-Discrepancy Theory states that people experience different emotions because they possess two distinct selves. Online platforms often encourage individuals to display idealized versions of themselves.

These perspectives show how digital spaces impact the process of developing personal identity.

Rationale

The initial development of social media started when platforms like Six Degrees and Facebook made their services available to all users. Users of Instagram and other similar platforms started to create and control their online presence as those platforms became more popular. People present themselves on social media through selective self-presentation, which enables them to show their best attributes. (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Manago et al., 2008) People present themselves on social media through selective self-presentation, which enables them to show their best attributes. (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Manago et al., 2008) People present themselves on social media through selective self-presentation, which enables them to show their best attributes. (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Manago et al., 2008) Previous research has established a connection between online self-presentation and various psychological results. Reinecke and Tripti (2014) discovered that users who strategically displayed themselves on social media platforms experienced difficulties understanding their self-identity. The study conducted by Vogel et al. (2014) discovered that social media users who engaged in comparison with others experienced a decline in their self-esteem. The research conducted by Feinstein et al. (2013) discovered that social media users who engaged in social comparison through their networks experienced depressive symptoms. Online settings cause fluctuations in self-concept clarity.

Campbell et al. (1996) introduced the concept of self-concept clarity, and subsequent research demonstrates that social media usage leads to decreased self-belief clarity and stability (Toma & Hancock, 2013). Research studies provide evidence for the significance of the Ideal Self construct. Researchers found that people who show online self-presentation that differs from their actual self-experience psychological distress and lower levels of happiness (Bussiere et al., 2007; Yang & Brown, 2016). People who create highly idealized online identities experience higher self-discrepancy and lower social authenticity according to research. (Twomey & O'Reilly, 2017) Researchers have discovered that people from different demographic groups exhibit distinct behavioural patterns. Haferkamp et al. (2012) established that females display greater tendency toward appearance-based self-presentation methods while males use competence-based methods to present themselves. The research conducted

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by Nesi and Prinstein in 2015 discovered that adolescents demonstrate greater ability to manage their social image while showing increased sensitivity to feedback from their peers when compared to older young adults. Research from other countries supports these relationships, but researchers have not studied the relationship between online self-presentation, Ideal Self and self-concept clarity in Indian samples. The study investigates how online self-presentation affects self-concept clarity which includes Ideal Self as a factor that predicts self-concept and demographic differences between these two variables.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The current research examined 150 young adults who consisted of 73 males and 77 females. The participants had ages that ranged from 18 years to 30 years. The researchers used educational institutions and online platforms to recruit participants through convenience sampling. All participants used social media applications which included Instagram and WhatsApp and Snapchat and LinkedIn. The research study allowed participants to choose their involvement while researchers explained the study objectives to participants before they completed the survey.

Sampling Technique

A non-probability convenience sampling to gather their data. The researchers chose this sampling method because they needed to access participants who matched their study requirements about online identity presentation research with young adults. The study required participants to demonstrate active usage of social media platforms to meet eligibility criteria.

Table 1. Demographic Distributions of the sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	13–20	66	44.0
	21–30	84	56.0
Gender	Male	73	48.7
	Female	77	51.3
Social Media Apps Used	Instagram	53	35.3
	Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, LinkedIn	29	19.3
	WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat	32	21.3
	WhatsApp	14	9.3
	LinkedIn	14	9.3
	Instagram, Snapchat	5	3.3
	Snapchat	2	1.3
WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter	1	0.7	

Research Design

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional research design to research how social media usage affects online self-presentation and identity development in young adults. The design enabled the researcher to analyse associations between study variables and examine predictive relationships.

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Instruments

- Presentation of Online Self Scale (POSS) The Presentation of Online Self Scale (POSS) was used to assess the extent to which individuals engage in impression management and selective self-presentation on social media platforms. The scale measures aspects which include curated identity expression and digital impression management together with perceived online identity control. The scale used five response options which ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to measure participant answers. Higher scores indicate that users present themselves online in a more planned and intentional manner.
- Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS) The Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS) developed by Jennifer D. Campbell and colleagues was used to measure the clarity and stability of an individual's self-concept. The scale evaluates how clearly and consistently individuals define their sense of self. Participants used a five-point Likert scale to rate items which showed that higher scores represented greater self-concept clarity.

Procedure

Data were collected by using an online survey questionnaire to collect data. The researchers explained the study purpose to participants while promising to protect their identity during the research process. The respondents completed demographic information and then used standardized tests to evaluate their online self-presentation and self-concept. The data collection process ensured that participants could decide whether to participate and that their identities would be kept secret.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines which protect psychological research practices throughout the entire research process. The researchers explained the study purpose to participants who received information about their right to leave the study at any moment. The researchers protected participant identities while using the collected data for academic research only.

Statistical Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. The researchers used descriptive statistics to establish frequency percentage and mean and standard deviation values which they used to summarize both demographic data and study variables. The researchers used Pearson correlation analysis to study the relationships between the different variables. The researchers used simple linear regression analysis to test whether online self-presentation and ideal self and multiple selves predicted self-concept development. The researchers performed independent samples t-tests, to test gender differences, while one-way ANOVA determined group differences between the study variables. The researchers established statistical significance at the $p < .05$ threshold.

RESULTS

Interrelationship among Dimensions of Online Self-Presentation and Self-Concept among Young Adults

Objective: The study will investigate how young adults use online self-presentation.

Hypothesis (H01): There will be a significant relationship between ideal self, multiple selves, consistent self, online presentation, and self-concept.

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Table 2. Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables

Variables	Ideal Self	Multiple Selves	Consistent Self	Online Presentation	Self-Concept
1. Ideal Self	—				
2. Multiple Selves	.96**	—			
3. Consistent Self	.96**	.98**	—		
4. Online Presentation	.95**	.97**	.98**	—	
5. Self-Concept	.91**	.93**	.94**	.95**	—

Note. $p < .01$

Interpretation

The study found that all research variables showed both positive relationships and significant connections with each other at the 0.01 level of testing. Ideal Self showed a strong positive correlation with Multiple Selves ($r = .96, p < .01$), Consistent Self ($r = .96, p < .01$), Online Presentation ($r = .95, p < .01$), and Self-Concept ($r = .91, p < .01$). Multiple Selves established strong connections with its three dimensions through its relationship with Consistent Self ($r = .98, p < .01$) and Online Presentation ($r = .97, p < .01$), and Self-Concept ($r = .93, p < .01$). The results show that social media users who build their online presence through active identity management tend to develop stronger self-concept understanding. The study results confirmed the proposed relationship between all variables which were studied.

Online Self-Presentation as a Predictor of Self-Concept among Young Adults

Objective: To examine whether online presentation predicts self-concept among young adults.

Hypothesis (H02): Online presentation significantly predicts self-concept.

Table 3 Simple Linear Regression Predicting Self-Concept from Online Presentation

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	2.391	1.120	—	2.136	.034
Online Presentation	3.754	.106	.946	35.533	<.001

Interpretation

The data in Table 3 reveals that the Online Presentation regression coefficient reaches a significant level because its value equals .946 which produced a test statistic of 35.533 and results in a p-value below .001. The predictor variable establishes a substantial effect on self-concept because its p-value falls below the .05 threshold. People use online self-presentation to create their self-image which shows its important impact on their self-perception. The hypothesis which postulates that online presentation has a strong predictive effect on self-concept development has been proved correct.

Hypothesis supported

Influence of Multiple Selves on Self-Concept Development among Young Adults Objective:

To examine whether multiple selves influence self-concept.

Hypothesis 3: Multiple selves significantly predict self-concept.

Table 4 Simple Linear Regression Predicting Self-Concept from Multiple Selves

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	-1.578	1.387	—	-1.137	.257
Multiple Selves	2.466	.079	.932	31.387	< .001

Interpretation

Regression Analysis Predicting Self-Concept from Multiple Selves from Table 3, it is observed that the t-value associated with Multiple Selves is significant ($t = 31.387, p < .001$). Multiple Selves shows a statistically significant prediction capacity for Self-Concept because its p-value stays below the 0.05 level of significance. Social media users who show different personalities throughout their profiles will develop their self-concept in different ways. The Multiple Selves hypothesis which states that people use multiple identities to shape their self-concept development has received evidence to support it.

Hypothesis supported.

Role of Ideal Self in Predicting Self-Concept among Young Adults

Objective: To examine the role of ideal self in predicting self-concept.

Hypothesis 4: Ideal self significantly predicts self-concept development.

Table 5 Simple Linear Regression Predicting Self-Concept from Ideal Self

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	-1.498	1.653	—	-.906	.366
Ideal Self	1.381	.053	.907	26.231	< .001

Interpretation

Regression Analysis Predicting Self-Concept from Ideal Self The t-value for Ideal Self has reached a statistically significant level according to Table 4 which shows that it has achieved this status through its t-value of 26.231 and p-value below .001. The Ideal Self measurement shows a significant capacity to predict Self-Concept because its p-value stands under the .05 threshold.

People who present their idealized self-image on social media platforms will develop their self- concept at a higher rate. The Ideal Self hypothesis which states that it predicts self-concept development has received acceptance.

Hypothesis supported.

Gender-Based Comparison of Online Self-Presentation among Young Adults

Objective: To examine gender differences in online self-presentation.

Hypothesis 5: There will be significant gender differences in online self-presentation.

Table 6 Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Online Self-Presentation

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	p
Male	73	41.32	11.11	1.30	-0.959	148	.339
Female	77	39.30	14.33	1.63			

Interpretation

t-Test for Gender Differences in Online Self-Presentation The results of the test show a t-value which equals to -0.959 with a degree of freedom at 148 and a p-value at 0.339. The result shows no significant difference between male and female participants who present themselves online. The hypothesis which claims that online self-presentation shows significant gender differences has been disproven. The two groups show equal social media self-presentation patterns according to their gender.

Hypothesis not supported.

Gender-Based Comparison of Self-Concept among Young Adults

Objective: To examine gender differences in self-concept development.

Hypothesis 6: There will be significant gender differences in self-concept.

Table 7 Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Self-Concept

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	p
Male	73	41.32	11.11	1.30	-0.959	148	.339
Female	77	39.30	14.33	1.63			

Interpretation

t-Test for Gender Differences in Self-Concept The results from Table 6 show a t-value which equals to -0.959 with a degree of freedom at 148 and a p-value at 0.339. The result shows no significant difference between male and female participants regarding their development of self- concept. The hypothesis which claims that self-concept develops differently for males and females has been disproven. The research shows that young adults develop self-concept clarity without any significant gender-based differences.

Hypothesis not supported.

Group Differences in Ideal Self, Multiple Selves, Consistent Self, and Online Self-Presentation

Objective: To examine group differences in study variables.

Hypothesis 7: There will be significant group differences in ideal self, multiple selves, consistent self, and online presentation.

Table 8 One-Way ANOVA Showing Differences Among Groups in Study Variables

Variable	F	df	p
Ideal Self	0.08	(1,148)	.774
Multiple Selves	0.21	(1,148)	.643
Consistent Self	0.07	(1,148)	.785
Online Presentation	0.30	(1,148)	.584

Interpretation

One-Way ANOVA Among Study Variables The research shows that Ideal Self achieved an F- value of 0.08 and Multiple Selves reached 0.21 and Consistent Self obtained 0.07 and Online Presentation reached 0.30 yet these values remain essential because their p-values exceed 0.05. The study shows that different groups lack significant differences in relation to the study variables. The hypothesis which claims that groups show different results has not been proven according to the study results. **Hypothesis not supported.**

DISCUSSION

The current research studied how social media affects young adults' ability to present themselves online and build their personal identities. The research results show how digital platforms affect the process through which people develop their self-concept and express their identity in modern society.

The study discovered that people who developed their ideal self and multiple selves and their consistent self and online presentation skills achieved stronger self-development. People who design and oversee their online presence will experience improved self-awareness according to the results of the study. Social media platforms enable users to choose which elements of their character and life events and accomplishments to display, thereby creating an internal identity reinforcement mechanism. The research results support Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, which states that adolescents and young adults need to complete an identity development process. Social media platforms in contemporary digital environments function as identity development spaces for people to test and enhance their personal identities.

The regression analysis results showed that people who present themselves online through self-presentation techniques will develop their self-concept. People who actively manage their online profiles by posting content and interacting with their audience will build a deeper understanding of their personality traits. The research finding supports Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, which describes how people in social situations act out specific roles to control how others perceive them. Social media platforms operate as digital performance spaces where users create specific impressions that they want other people to believe about them. People use social media platforms to receive affirmations from others, which helps them develop their perceived identity through likes and comments and shares.

The research results showed that multiple selves had a major impact on how people built their self-concept. Social media platforms allow users to share different parts of their identity throughout various social situations and with different groups of people and across different digital networks. The ability to express multiple identities enables people to test various personal attributes and social roles. The process creates difficulties because it requires individuals to maintain their identity throughout multiple situations. The findings support E. Tory Higgins self-discrepancy theory which states that people assess themselves and their emotions based on their actual self and ideal self and their required self. Users of social media platforms display idealized images of themselves which increases the gap between their actual self and their online persona.

The analysis found that people who see their ideal self as a goal strongly establish their self-identity. People show their social media presence by creating an ideal version of themselves which they think will improve their public image. People who create idealized self-presentations need to change their actual behavior according to their preferred identity. The process of social comparison occurs when people see highly structured images of other people's accomplishments. Social comparison on digital platforms affects self-esteem and identity clarity and psychological well-being according to previous studies.

The study showed that online self-presentation and self-concept showed no significant differences between male and female participants. The research demonstrates that both genders use social media platforms in similar ways to develop their digital identities. People now show online behavior through Internet platforms which has become a regular pattern for both male and female users. Young adults regardless of gender may experience similar

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motivations to present themselves positively and maintain social connections through online platforms.

The study used first-order ANOVA to demonstrate that all groups showed no significant differences in main study variables which tested their hypotheses. The study result demonstrates that social media platforms influence identity formation processes which affect young adults from various demographic backgrounds. The psychological effects experienced by users remain consistent because social networking platforms have become widely available and commonly used.

The research demonstrates that social media use has a major impact on identity development processes which young adults experience. Digital platforms offer users chances for self-discovery and social connections and identity testing. The online platforms which people use to create their digital presence need to follow particular guidelines which will shape their self-assessment and their assessment of other people. Digital age professionals from psychology and education and mental health care must understand these dynamics because they work with young people.

CONCLUSION

The current research investigated how social media affects young adults' online self-exhibition and their development of personal identity. The study found strong connections between different aspects of online self-exhibition which included ideal self-multiple selves and consistent self and online presentation and self-concept. The study results show that social media platforms establish important boundaries which determine how users build their personal identity through social media. The study used regression analysis to show that users present themselves online through multiple identities which include their ideal self to reveal their personal self-concept. Young adults use active identity management to create their digital personas which help them develop their personal identity. Social networking platforms provide users with chances to test different identity elements while they obtain social evaluation which helps them develop their self-identity. The study results showed no significant gender differences between men and women regarding their online self-presentation and self-concept. The study results show that social media platforms develop user identity to similar degrees for both men and women. The analysis of variance test showed no significant differences between study groups regarding the main research variables which suggests that young adults share common psychological methods for developing their online identities. The research results show that social media platforms have become vital spaces where people discover their identities and show their true selves. The growing prevalence of digital interactions makes it crucial to grasp their psychological effects which researchers and practitioners must understand.

Limitation

The research results reveal how digital spaces affect the process of creating personal identities. Users of social media platforms use these platforms to test different ways of showing themselves while getting responses from other users. The process impacts personal identity development and self-concept understanding. The research confirms the identity development theories proposed by Erik Erikson and the impression management theories of Erving Goffman. Educational institutions can use these findings to promote digital awareness among students. Educators can create programs to help young adults use social media responsibly while developing their identity through understanding how online interactions shape their self-perception. Mental health professionals and counsellors should assess social media impact on

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young people who struggle with identity issues and self-esteem problems and their tendency to compare themselves to others. Counselling sessions that include online identity and digital behavior discussions can assist people in developing better social media relationships. The research shows how digital platforms have become more important in daily life. Society must promote responsible digital communication which displays genuine self-representation because online self-presentation has become a widespread practice. Digital literacy education and awareness training will enable people to better handle online environments. The study establishes a basis for upcoming research that investigates how social media impacts psychological well-being. Future research will investigate how social comparability impacts self-esteem and body image together with other variables.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Hashim, Z. & Shoaib, F. (2026). Online Self-Presentation and Self-Concept Clarity among Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *14*(1), 2588-2598. DIP:18.01.258.20261401, DOI:10.25215/1401.258