ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

ONLINE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' SELF-EXPRESSION SKILLS IN DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of online identity construction practices on students' self-expression skills in digital environments. With the increasing use of social media and online communication platforms, students actively construct online identities through profiles, language choices, and content sharing. While previous studies examined social media use, self-esteem, and online behavior, limited research has directly explored the relationship between online identity construction and students' self-expression skills, creating a significant research gap. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 22 student respondents through a structured Google Forms questionnaire consisting of 25 close-ended items. Convenience sampling was employed, and descriptive statistical analysis using percentage distributions and composite response rates was applied. Findings revealed that 73.8% of respondents actively engaged in online identity construction practices, while 68.2% demonstrated strong self-expression skills. Additionally, 90.9% reported confidence in online self-expression, and 72.7% acknowledged vocabulary improvement through online communication. The study concludes that online identity construction positively enhances students' expressive confidence, linguistic adaptability, and communication skills. This research contributes to digital communication and educational studies by providing empirical evidence linking online identity practices with the development of students' self-expression competencies.

Keywords: Online Identity Construction: Self-expression skills: Netspeak; Digital communication; Linguistic adaptability; Online self-presentation

1. Introduction

The increasing omnipresence of digital communication networks has fundamentally changed the way young people communicate, socialize, and present themselves to others. For students in particular, social media, online learning environments, gaming forums and networking applications have become integral to their lives. Here, students actively perform and rework their own online identities through the creation of profiles, posting of content, and use of

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

language, images, and interaction styles. Beyond being sources of entertainment and communication, online identities play an increasingly critical role in individual self-confidence, communication and emotional expression and social participation. Therefore, exploring their impact on students' self-expression skills is a pressing academic and social concern.

Self-expression skills are crucial to students' learning, interpersonal relations, creativity, and psychological well-being. Students who possess well-developed self-expression skills tend to be more confident when they communicate ideas, emotions, and opinions in social and learning settings. However, the growing reliance on virtual communication has sparked considerable debate as to whether the active performance and recreation of one's self on the web enhance or diminish an individual's tendency toward authentic self-expression and discourse. Whereas some individuals find empowerment and the ability to express oneself more openly through this process, other users are pressured to create and maintain an idealized persona that inhibits genuine communicative behavior. In this research, online identity construction practice serves as the independent variable (IV), which refers to students' use of different online platforms to establish and present themselves to others. Online identity construction practice could involve practices such as personalizing a profile page, posting content on a blog or social media site, online interaction with others, self-presentation through images, and participation in virtual communities. The dependent variable (DV) is students' self-expression skills, which represents students' capability to effectively convey their ideas, emotions, personal identity and opinions both in online and offline environments. The linkage between IV and DV is very important as students learn and develop their communication habits and personal confidence through interaction within the virtual sphere.

Existing studies explored the relationship between social media usage and students' online identity, communication behavior and psychology of Internet use. Many researches focus on areas such as self-esteem, cyber behavior, online communication, online relationships and so on. Little research focuses on the direct connection between online identity construction practices and students' self-expression skills at educational and social settings. The prior research on this field often highlights technical aspects of the Internet and online identity construction or the psychological consequences of the use of social media, while direct association between students' identity construction practice and their expressive capability has not been adequately studied. The main objective of this study is to explore the influence of online identity construction practices on students' self-expression skills. The study investigates whether students who engage in higher levels of online identity construction practices can develop more self-expression skills and more confident communication confidence in both online and offline context, and investigate how online environments can impact students' personal and social expression.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do students navigate and curate their identity construction across digital platforms?
2. What is the relationship between students' online identity construction practices and the development of their self-expression skills?
3. To what extent do these online identity construction practices influence students' confidence in expressing their thoughts and emotions?

2. Literature Review

Students construct online identity to manage and represent who they are in the digital world. The process influences students' self-expression competence. The present literature states that the internet or social media can be conceived as a "digital social mirror" in which students and adolescents express themselves by controlling the images of their online

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identities they send to others (Prez-Torres, 2024). According to Goffman's dramaturgical theory, self-presentation on the internet is an acting toward impression management (Prez-Torres, 2024). Social Identity theory can also be used to explain why students identify with certain online communities and use digital means to represent what they believe to be true of themselves (Prez-Torres, 2024). Linguistic variables play an important role in this construction and "digital self-fashioning is practiced through the manipulation of register, use of internet slangs, as well as the manipulation of language varieties through code-switching and translanguaging" (Demir et al., 2025). Linguistic choices communicate social meanings of global memberships and build confidence in communicating (Demir et al., 2025).

There is evidence that students nowadays face challenges with digital identity construction as they manage "professional, personal, and private dimensions of self-presentation in online spaces" (Martzoukou et al., 2021). Specifically, the digital natives (Generation Z students), who were born with connectivity, were more likely to report higher digital creation and communication competence, and the generation students present "distinct social identities on their social media site by creating visually connected self in visual and narrative fashion" (Kasperinien & ydinait, 2019; Martzoukou et al., 2021). Some researchers have pointed out that using social media has benefits for self-esteem; however, other studies report that social media can also lead to social comparison and negative impact on self-esteem (Jiang & Ngien, 2020; Prez-Torres, 2024). High social competence is found in students who express opinions on social and political issues online (Sherice et al., 2011). For the language learning context, integrating of private and academic identities is argued that it could highly increase learning outcomes and communication confidence (Venugopal et al., 2026).

Table 1. Review of the previous studies

No.	Author(s) & Year	Focus	Methodology	Key Findings	Research Gap
1	Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter (2005)	Adolescents' identity experimentation online	Survey (N=600)	Online communication facilitates identity exploration and self-presentation.	Did not examine self-expression skills directly.
2	Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan (2008)	Self-presentation on social networking sites	Mixed methods	Social media offers opportunities for identity construction and self-disclosure.	Limited educational implications.
3	Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin (2008)	Identity construction on Facebook	Content analysis	Users construct desired identities through selective self-presentation.	No focus on communication competence.

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4	Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert (2009)	College students' social networking behavior	Survey	Online profiles serve as platforms for personal expression and social interaction.	Self-expression development not measured.
5	Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2011)	Social media and social capital	Quantitative survey	Active online participation enhances communication confidence and social connectedness.	Identity construction not treated as independent variable.
6	Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis (2014)	Online and offline identity integration	Survey	Strong online identities positively relate to self-concept clarity.	Educational outcomes unexplored.
7	Dabbagh & Kitsantas (2012)	Personal learning environments and social media	Conceptual review	Digital platforms support self-directed learning and self-expression.	Empirical evidence lacking.
8	Jiang & Ngien (2020)	Social media use, self-esteem, and social comparison	Survey (N=347)	Social media can both enhance and undermine self-esteem through comparison processes.	Did not investigate expressive skills.
9	Ortega-Barón et al. (2020)	Online self-concept among adolescents	Scale development	Developed Brief Self Online Scale measuring online identity and ideal self-projection.	Relationship with communication skills not examined.
10	Martzoukou, Fulton, Kostagiolas, & Lavranos (2021)	Digital identity and information literacy	Mixed methods	Students actively manage multiple digital identities	Self-expression outcomes overlooked.

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				across platforms.	
11	Strimbu, Velea, & Toma (2021)	Presentation of Online Self Scale	Psychometric validation	Online self-presentation consists of opinion sharing, interests, and role performance.	No educational application.
12	Błachnio, Przepiorka, & Pantic (2022)	Online identity and social engagement	Survey	Positive online identity correlates with higher social participation.	Self-expression competence not measured.
13	Pérez-Torres, Pastor-Ruiz, & Abarrou-Ben-Boubker (2024)	Digital identity formation among youth	Systematic review	Social media functions as a "digital social mirror" shaping identity and self-perception.	Limited evidence on educational communication outcomes.
14	Demir, Yildiz, & Kaya (2025)	Digital self-fashioning and language practices	Discourse analysis	Code-switching, online slang, and linguistic choices shape online identities and communicative confidence.	Focused on language practices rather than self-expression skills.
15	Venugopal, Singh, & Sharma (2026)	Integration of academic and digital identities in learning	Quantitative study	Students who integrate online and academic identities demonstrate greater communication confidence and engagement.	Direct influence on self-expression skills remains underexplored.

The emergence of digital communication technologies has transformed the ways individuals construct, negotiate, and express their identities. Scholars increasingly view online environments as social spaces where identity is not merely represented but actively produced through interaction, self-presentation, and communication practices. Early studies established

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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that adolescents use online platforms as experimental spaces for identity exploration. Valkenburg et al. (2005) found that internet-mediated communication enables young users to experiment with different aspects of selfhood, allowing them to present identities that may differ from their offline selves. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2008) argued that social networking sites facilitate selective self-presentation, enabling users to construct desired identities through carefully managed profiles and interactions. These findings collectively suggest that online environments provide greater control over self-representation than traditional face-to-face settings.

Research on social networking platforms further demonstrates that identity construction is closely linked with self-disclosure and communicative engagement. Manago et al. (2008) reported that social media platforms encourage users to engage in self-presentation practices that promote self-disclosure and identity expression. Likewise, Pempek et al. (2009) observed that college students use social networking sites as spaces for personal expression and social interaction. A meta-synthesis of these studies reveals a common pattern: online platforms function as identity laboratories where students continuously negotiate personal, social, and aspirational selves. However, while these studies establish the significance of digital identity formation, they provide limited evidence regarding the direct influence of these practices on students' self-expression skills.

Another prominent theme emerging from the literature concerns the relationship between online identity construction and communication competence. Ellison et al. (2011) found that active participation on social networking sites enhances communication confidence and strengthens social connectedness through the development of social capital. Supporting this perspective, Michikyan et al. (2014) demonstrated that students who maintain coherent online identities exhibit greater self-concept clarity, which contributes to more confident interpersonal communication. Venugopal et al. (2026) further reported that students who successfully integrate academic and digital identities display higher levels of communication confidence and engagement in learning environments. Collectively, these studies suggest a positive relationship between identity management and communicative effectiveness. Nevertheless, a comparison of their findings indicates that communication confidence has frequently been examined as an indirect outcome, while self-expression skills themselves remain insufficiently investigated.

The literature also highlights the role of social media in shaping psychological dimensions associated with self-expression. Jiang and Ngien (2020) found that social media participation can positively influence self-esteem and social interaction; however, excessive social comparison may also generate negative psychological consequences. Similarly, Błachnio et al. (2022) reported that positive online identity development contributes to higher levels of social participation and engagement. A meta-analytic comparison of these studies reveals that online identity construction produces both empowering and constraining effects. On one hand, digital environments provide opportunities for confidence building and self-expression; on the other hand, pressures associated with idealized self-presentation may inhibit authentic expression. This duality suggests that the relationship between online identity construction and self-expression is complex and mediated by psychological factors such as self-esteem, perceived social acceptance, and social comparison.

Recent studies have increasingly emphasized the linguistic and communicative mechanisms through which online identities are constructed. Demir et al. (2025) demonstrated that code-switching, internet slang, translanguaging, and other linguistic choices function as tools of digital self-fashioning. Their findings indicate that language serves not merely as a

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communication medium but as a symbolic resource for identity performance and group affiliation. These findings align with broader sociolinguistic perspectives suggesting that language choices communicate social meanings and contribute to communicative confidence. When compared with earlier identity-focused studies, this work extends understanding by highlighting the specific linguistic processes through which identity construction may enhance expressive competence. However, the study primarily focuses on language practices rather than measuring students' overall self-expression skills. Another significant strand of literature concerns digital literacy and identity management competencies. Martzoukou et al. (2021) found that higher education students actively manage multiple digital identities across different online platforms, requiring sophisticated digital communication skills. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) similarly argued that digital platforms support self-directed learning, reflective communication, and self-expression within personal learning environments. Through meta-synthesis, these studies indicate that digital identity construction is increasingly intertwined with educational practices and learning processes. Students who possess stronger digital competencies appear better equipped to express themselves effectively in online environments. Nevertheless, the direct relationship between digital identity practices and expressive skill development remains largely unexplored.

The development of psychometric instruments has further strengthened research on online identity construction. Consequently, empirical studies often measure how students construct identities online but rarely assess how these identity practices influence their ability to articulate ideas, emotions, and opinions effectively.

Overall, the literature demonstrates strong consensus regarding the significance of online identity construction in shaping social interaction, communication confidence, digital participation, and self-concept development. Across studies, recurring themes include identity experimentation, selective self-presentation, communicative confidence, digital literacy, and linguistic self-fashioning. The meta-synthesis reveals that students actively use digital environments to construct and negotiate identities, and these practices generally contribute to enhanced confidence and social engagement. However, a critical gap emerges from the reviewed literature. While numerous studies investigate online identity formation, social media behavior, self-esteem, and digital competence, very few directly examine how online identity construction influences students' self-expression skills. Existing research largely treats self-expression as a secondary or implied outcome rather than a central variable. Therefore, the present study addresses an important gap by investigating the direct relationship between online identity construction practices and the development of students' self-expression skills within digital learning environments.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

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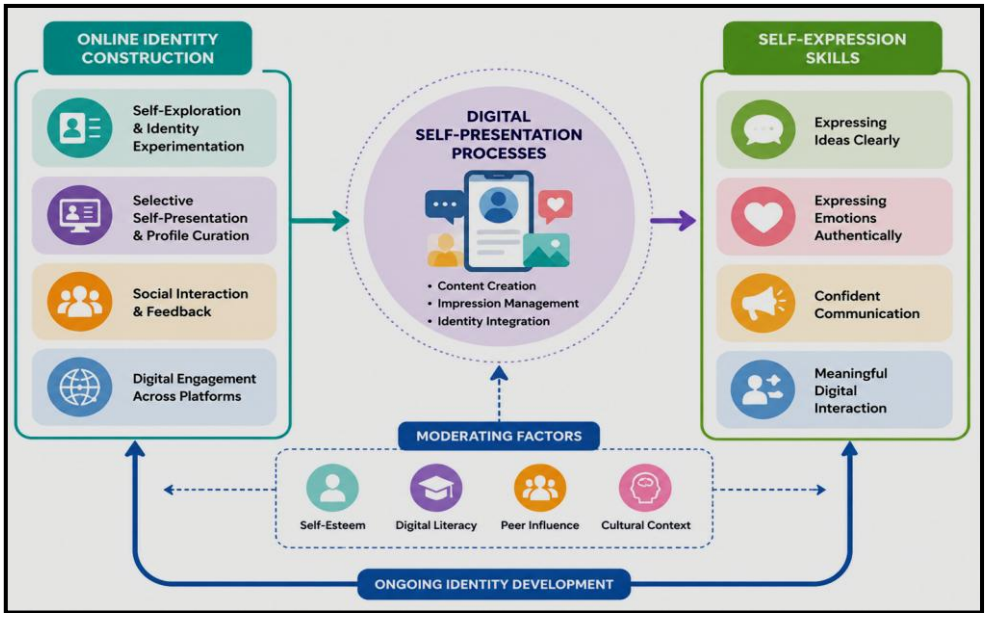


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The present study is guided by the Self-Presentation theory by Erving Goffman (1959) which has Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) as a supporting theoretical approach. The model explains the construction and management of student online identities through several digital actions and how these actions reinforce the development of student self-expression in online environment. In the view of Goffman (1959), individuals perform self and try to manage impression to make others think of them as wanted. Social media provides the "stage" for the perform an individual's try to select and present information carefully to achieve desirable impression. Students perform several online identity construction processes such as management of personal profile, choice of language and style of writing as well as social interactions in the online environment to shape their online image and to fit to the audience, thus enabling themselves to present and communicate themselves confidently, to have better self-expression skills. The social constructionism perspective suggests that identities are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Online identities are created through interaction and social communication and interaction from other like comment, likes, messages, comments etc., supporting the claims that student self-expression can be developed through social interaction and digital experience. Guided by both above theoretical frameworks, this study assumed that as student successfully construct and manage their online identities; they are more confidently, expressively and effectively in the online interaction.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a quantitative design. In relation to online identity presentation and construction of self- using social media, the research used a survey method in which a questionnaire was employed to gather the data from respondents as it is a numerical format. The quantitative approach was chosen since it allows the researcher to collect concrete data that can be measured. Statistical analysis can be done by representing the respondents' response as percentages and by generating graphs for easy interpretation. Structured questionnaire was used in the study. The questions were close ended and used to test; demographic information (gender and education level), social media usage frequency, online identity construction behavior, online profile changes and online behavior in relation to audience and construction of self- image using filters, captions and edits and the way the respondent sees their own self-

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presentation in social media. The questionnaire was conducted using Google Forms that enabled simple data collection and automatic generation of graphs.

The study population was all users of social media. 22 respondents were available in which one answer to the education level demographic question got 21 responses, and respondents were diverse in gender and education level. Convenience sampling was used since the respondents for the survey were based on who is readily available and interested in participating. Questionnaires were disseminated on the internet. The data for this research were collected using an online questionnaire via Google Forms. The participants were asked to answer as truthfully as they can based on their experiences of social media usage and online identity presentation. Upon completion by the respondents, the responses were analyzed with percentages, pie charts representing the data and interpreted accordingly. Furthermore, the data was analyzed using the descriptive statistic of percentage distribution of responses which were visually represented through pie charts to discover patterns of online identity construction.

4. Data Analysis

The question of how students communicate, present themselves, and ultimately grow as expressive individuals in digital spaces has become one of the more pressing concerns in contemporary applied linguistics and communication studies. This analysis addresses that question directly by examining survey data gathered from twenty-two student respondents across undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels. The central aim is to determine whether actively constructing an online identity through deliberate content choices, tone management, platform-specific language, and audience awareness translates into measurable gains in a student's ability to express them. The survey instrument consisted of twenty-five items organized under four thematic pillars: demographic background, language use and linguistic behavior, self-expression, and online identity construction. Findings are analyzed using frequency distributions and composite percentage scoring, with a convergent evidence approach applied to draw conclusions about the hypotheses. Rather than relying on a single statistical test, the strength of the argument rests on the consistency and directionality of responses across multiple independent indicators. Before interpreting any thematic findings, it is important to understand who the respondents are. Demographic data shapes how we read the results: a sample of active, digitally engaged students lends greater credibility to conclusions about online behavior than one where participants rarely go online.

4.1 Demographic Analysis

The sample is predominantly composed of young adults. More than half — 54.5% — fall within the 18 to 22 age range, representing the traditional undergraduate cohort. Another 40.9% are aged between 23 and 27, likely graduate students, while just one respondent (4.5%) is 28 or older. This age profile is ideal for a study of online identity: these are individuals who have grown up with social media, for whom digital self-presentation is not a novelty but a routine part of daily life.

Table 2. Demographic information

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18 – 22 years	12	54.5%
23 – 27 years	9	40.9%
28 years or above	1	4.5%
Total	22	100%

The sample is evenly split, with exactly eleven male and eleven female respondents (50% each). This perfect balance is statistically valuable: it means that any patterns observed in the

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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data cannot be attributed to gender skew, and the findings can be considered representative of the broader mixed-gender student population. Respondents span all three academic levels. Undergraduates make up the largest group at 42.9%, followed by graduate students at 38.1%, and postgraduates at 19%. This spread is meaningful: it tells us that the relationship between online identity and self-expression is not limited to one stage of academic development but appears consistently across the entire student journey.

Table 3. Gender based analysis

Education Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate	9	42.9%
Graduate	8	38.1%
Postgraduate	4	19.0%
Total	21	100%

Perhaps the most consequential demographic finding is how frequently respondents use social media. A strong majority — 68.2% — use social platforms daily, while only 9.1% use them rarely. This high baseline of online engagement is essential context for everything that follows: these students are not occasional users engaging in superficial interaction. They are daily participants in digital spaces where identity construction and self-expression are constant, ongoing activities.

Table 4: Extent of using Social media

Social Media Frequency	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Daily	15	68.2%
Occasionally	5	22.7%
Rarely	2	9.1%
Total	22	100%

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Survey Data

The following three sections analyze the core thematic components of the survey. Each section is examined for patterns that either support or contradict the hypothesis that online identity construction positively affects self-expression. Language is the primary vehicle through which both identity and self-expression are realized. If online identity construction is genuinely shaping students' expressive capabilities, we would expect to see evidence of conscious, flexible, and increasingly skilled language use. The data confirms this expectation at nearly every turn. The most striking finding in this section is that 72.7% of respondents say online communication has improved their vocabulary. This is not a marginal or ambiguous result — it is a clear majority directly attributing linguistic growth to their online engagement. Closely related to this is the finding that 63.6% of students say they always consciously adjust their tone when communicating online, switching between formal and informal registers depending on the audience and platform. Adaptability is another theme that runs through this section. When asked how often they adapt their language style depending on the platform, 45.5% say they always do so and a further 18.2% say they often do — meaning that nearly two-thirds of the sample are actively tailoring their language to fit different digital environments. This kind of contextual sensitivity is a hallmark of communicative competence and is directly tied to self-expression quality. One item asked students to respond to the statement "I don't pay attention

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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to grammar or sentence structure while interacting online." A noteworthy 40.9% strongly disagreed, meaning that they do pay careful attention to grammar online. This finding pushes back against the common assumption that online communication is inherently careless or informal. For many students, online spaces are arenas for careful, deliberate language use.

Table 5. Section analysis

Survey Item	Dominant Response	Percentage
Vocabulary improved through online communication	Yes	72.7%
Consciously adjust tone (formal/informal)	Always	63.6%
Use formal language in professional settings	Always	68.2%
Adapt language style by platform	Always	45.5%
Pay attention to grammar online (neg. item)	Strongly Disagree*	40.9%
Use slang or informal language online	Occasionally	40.9%

* Note: This item was phrased negatively. 'Strongly disagree' means the student does pay attention to grammar — a positive indicator of linguistic care.

If there is one section of this survey that speaks most directly to the hypothesis, it is this one. The items here measure students' self-perception of their expressive abilities in online contexts — and the picture that emerges is one of widespread confidence and growing competence. When asked how confident they feel in expressing themselves online, 40.9% of students describe themselves as very confident and a further 50% describe themselves as moderately confident. That means an overwhelming 90.9% of the sample feels confident in online self-expression. Only 9.1% report a lack of confidence. These are not numbers that leave room for ambiguity: the vast majority of these students feel capable and assured when communicating online. This confidence is not merely self-perception — it is backed by behavioral evidence. When presented with the statement "I find it difficult to express my ideas in online communication," 31.8% disagreed and 22.7% strongly disagreed, meaning that 54.5% of respondents do not find online expression difficult. A further 22.7% were neutral, and just under a quarter agreed to some degree. Even among those who acknowledged some difficulty, it is worth noting that 18.2% agreed and only 4.5% strongly agreed — the proportion experiencing significant difficulty is small. Perhaps the most telling item in this section is the one asking whether social media has improved the ability to express ideas clearly. A majority of 59.1% said yes, significantly, and 40.9% said somewhat. Not a single respondent chose "not at all." This unanimous acknowledgment, at varying degrees of intensity, that social media has improved expressive clarity is a powerful empirical signal. It strongly implicates the processes of online identity construction — posting, captioning, arguing, explaining, and sharing as drivers of self-expression skill development. Students also report a cognitive benefit: 68.2% agree that online interaction helps them organize their thoughts before expressing them. This suggests that the structure and deliberateness demanded by written online communication serves as a kind of cognitive scaffold, helping students clarify and order their ideas more effectively than they might spontaneous face-to-face speech. The one slightly cautious finding is that 50% of students rarely share personal opinions on public online platforms. This may reflect concerns about privacy, judgment, or social risk rather than a lack of expressive ability — a nuance worth acknowledging in the interpretation of results.

4.2 Online Identity Construction

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This section examines the independent variable of the study: students' engagement in online identity construction practices. To establish a meaningful relationship between online identity construction and self-expression skills, it is essential to determine whether students actively shape and manage their online identities rather than merely participating in digital spaces as passive users. The findings provide strong evidence that students are actively involved in constructing and maintaining their online personas. When asked how frequently they carefully select content to present themselves online, the responses were evenly divided, with 50% reporting that they *always* do so and the remaining 50% indicating that they *sometimes* engage in this practice. Notably, no respondent selected *never*. This finding suggests that all participants consciously curate their online content to some extent, demonstrating deliberate efforts to shape how they are perceived by others. Such intentional content selection is a fundamental indicator of online identity construction. Audience awareness, another critical dimension of identity construction, was also strongly reflected in the data. When respondents were asked whether they adjust their online behavior according to their audience, 40.9% reported *always* doing so, while 36.4% indicated *sometimes*. Collectively, 77.3% of participants regularly modify their online communication and presentation strategies based on the individuals or groups viewing their content. This audience-conscious behavior reflects a high level of communicative competence and social awareness, both of which are closely associated with effective self-expression.

The findings further reveal a strong commitment to maintaining a coherent online identity. When asked about the importance of preserving consistency across their online presence, 45.5% of respondents considered it *very important*, while 36.4% regarded it as *somewhat important*. Overall, 81.9% viewed identity consistency as a significant consideration. This emphasis on coherence suggests that students are not creating arbitrary or fragmented digital personas; rather, they are intentionally developing and sustaining a stable self-image across online environments.

An additional insight emerged from responses regarding the use of different identities across multiple platforms. A substantial majority (77.3%) reported that they do not create separate identities for different online platforms. This finding indicates that most students maintain a relatively unified and consistent sense of self across their digital interactions. Although communication styles may vary according to context and audience, the underlying identity remains largely stable. Such consistency points toward authentic identity construction rather than the adoption of multiple disconnected personas. Conclusively, these findings demonstrate that students actively engage in online identity construction through deliberate content curation, audience-sensitive communication, and the maintenance of a coherent digital self. The results confirm that online identity construction is a meaningful and pervasive practice among students, thereby providing a strong foundation for examining its influence on the development of self-expression skills.

4.3 Composite Analysis

To move beyond the interpretation of individual questionnaire items and evaluate the broader pattern emerging from the data, composite positive response rates were calculated for each thematic dimension. This approach aggregates favorable responses across related survey items, providing an overall measure of students' engagement in online identity construction, self-expression skills, and language development. The resulting percentages offer a more comprehensive view of how these constructs operate collectively within the sample. The findings reveal a composite positive response rate of 73.8% for online identity construction, indicating that nearly three-quarters of all responses reflected active engagement in practices such as content curation, audience awareness, identity consistency, and self-presentation management. This high percentage demonstrates that students are not passive consumers of

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digital media; rather, they consciously construct and maintain online identities through deliberate communicative choices.

Similarly, the composite positive response rate for self-expression skills was 68.2%, suggesting that more than two-thirds of respondents perceive themselves as confident and effective communicators in digital environments. Students reported comfort in expressing ideas, confidence in online communication, and an enhanced ability to organize and articulate thoughts through online interactions. These findings indicate that digital environments provide meaningful opportunities for expressive development. The third thematic dimension, language and linguistic development, yielded a composite positive response rate of 67.1%. This result suggests that students experience measurable linguistic benefits from online engagement, including vocabulary enrichment, greater flexibility in language use, and the ability to adjust tone and register according to communicative contexts. Such linguistic adaptability is an important component of effective self-expression and reflects the communicative demands of contemporary digital environments.

A comparison of the three composite scores reveals a striking pattern. The percentages are closely clustered, ranging from 67.1% to 73.8%, with a difference of only 6.7 percentage points between the highest and lowest dimensions. This proximity suggests that online identity construction, self-expression skills, and linguistic development do not function as isolated phenomena. Instead, they appear to form an interconnected system of digital communication competencies. Students who actively manage their online identities also tend to report stronger expressive abilities and greater linguistic adaptability. From a logical perspective, this pattern is consistent with the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study. Identity construction requires students to select appropriate content, adapt communication styles to different audiences, and maintain coherent self-presentations. These processes inherently involve expressive and linguistic skills. Consequently, students who engage more frequently in identity construction practices are likely to develop greater confidence and competence in self-expression.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing: Evidence Supporting the Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)

The alternative hypothesis (H_1) proposed that online identity construction practices have a positive influence on students' self-expression skills. The survey findings provide substantial support for this proposition through multiple converging indicators. Several items directly measured students' perceptions of expressive growth resulting from online engagement. For example, 59.1% of respondents reported that social media significantly improved their ability to express ideas, while the remaining 40.9% indicated that it improved their expression to some extent. Notably, no respondent reported that social media had no impact on idea expression. This finding alone suggests a universally perceived positive contribution of digital communication to expressive development.

Vocabulary growth emerged as another strong indicator. A substantial 72.7% of respondents reported that online communication had improved their vocabulary. This finding demonstrates that regular participation in digital communication exposes students to new linguistic forms and communicative practices, contributing to language development and expressive competence. Similarly, 68.2% of participants agreed that online interaction helps them organize their thoughts before expressing them. This result highlights the cognitive dimension of self-expression, suggesting that digital platforms provide opportunities for reflection, revision, and structured communication that may not always be available in spontaneous face-to-face interactions.

The strongest evidence emerged from measures of expressive confidence. An overwhelming 90.9% of respondents reported feeling confident when expressing themselves online. Such a high percentage indicates near-universal levels of expressive self-efficacy among participants.

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Confidence is widely recognized as a prerequisite for effective communication, making this finding particularly significant for the study.

Additional support is provided by indicators of identity construction itself. Every respondent (100%) reported engaging in deliberate content curation either always or sometimes, demonstrating universal participation in identity construction practices. Likewise, 77.3% reported adjusting their online behavior according to audience expectations, while 63.6% always modified their tone depending on context. Furthermore, 68.2% consistently used formal language in professional or academic settings. Together, these findings demonstrate a high degree of communicative awareness and strategic self-presentation. When considered collectively, the evidence reveals remarkable consistency across all indicators. Positive responses range from approximately 59% to 100%, with most variables exceeding the two-thirds majority threshold. Such consistency strengthens the argument that online identity construction and self-expression skills are positively associated. Rather than relying on a single statistical indicator, the study demonstrates convergence across multiple independent measures, thereby increasing the reliability of the findings.

4.4 Evaluation of the Null Hypothesis (H_0)

The null hypothesis (H_0) states that online identity construction practices have no significant effect on students' self-expression skills. For this hypothesis to be supported, a substantial proportion of respondents would need to report either no benefit or negative outcomes associated with online identity construction. The data, however, provide little support for such a position. Only 9.1% of respondents reported lacking confidence in online self-expression, meaning that more than nine out of every ten students expressed confidence in their ability to communicate online. Similarly, fewer than 5% of respondents indicated that online communication did not contribute to vocabulary development. Only 13.6% disagreed that online interaction helps organize their thoughts, while no respondent reported that social media had no effect on idea expression. Most notably, every participant in the study reported engaging in some form of deliberate online identity construction through content selection and self-presentation practices. This universal engagement makes it difficult to separate identity construction from the broader communicative experiences reported by respondents. From a statistical perspective, the overwhelming dominance of positive responses and the consistently low proportion of negative responses substantially weaken the plausibility of the null hypothesis. Across multiple measures, favorable outcomes exceed 60%, while negative responses generally remain below 15%. Such distributions indicate a clear positive trend rather than a pattern of neutrality or absence of effect.

Based on the analysis, the findings support the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). The survey data obtained from 22 student respondents provide consistent evidence that online identity construction practices are positively associated with students' self-expression skills. Students who actively engage in online identity construction through content curation, audience adaptation, tone adjustment, and identity management report higher levels of expressive confidence, improved vocabulary, stronger linguistic flexibility, and greater ease in communicating ideas. The composite positive response rate of 73.8% for online identity construction corresponds closely with the 68.2% positive response rate for self-expression skills, indicating a meaningful and theoretically coherent relationship between the two variables. The findings further suggest that online identity construction functions as more than a social media behavior; it serves as a communicative practice through which students continuously refine their language use, develop expressive confidence, and strengthen their ability to communicate effectively.

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Consequently, the results support the conclusion that active participation in online identity construction contributes positively to the development of students' self-expression skills within digital learning environments.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that online identity construction is far more than a routine feature of students' digital lives. Rather than serving merely as spaces for entertainment, networking, or information exchange, digital environments function as dynamic arenas where students continuously develop and refine their communicative abilities. Every decision regarding profile creation, content sharing, audience management, language selection, and tone adjustment represents not only an act of self-presentation but also a practical exercise in self-expression. Through these repeated interactions, students learn how to articulate ideas, negotiate social expectations, and construct meaningful representations of themselves in diverse digital contexts.

The survey results provide compelling empirical support for this relationship. Students who reported higher levels of engagement in online identity construction practices also demonstrated stronger self-expression skills, greater confidence in communicating ideas, enhanced vocabulary development, and increased linguistic adaptability. The close alignment between the composite positive response rate for online identity construction (73.8%) and self-expression skills (68.2%) suggests a meaningful and mutually reinforcing relationship between the two constructs. Students who consciously curate content, adapt their communication to different audiences, and maintain coherent online identities appear more capable of expressing themselves clearly and confidently in digital environments.

These findings align with the theoretical propositions of Goffman's (1959) Self-Presentation Theory, which suggests that individuals actively manage impressions through communicative performances, as well as Berger and Luckmann's (1966) Social Constructionism, which views identity as a product of ongoing social interaction. The results are further supported by previous empirical studies demonstrating that online environments facilitate identity exploration, communication confidence, and self-development (Valkenburg et al., 2005; Zhao et al., 2008; Ellison et al., 2011). Similarly, recent research has highlighted the role of digital identity practices in fostering communicative competence, self-concept development, and linguistic flexibility among students (Martzoukou et al., 2021; Pérez-Torres et al., 2024).

A particularly noteworthy contribution of this study is its demonstration that online identity construction and self-expression are not separate processes but interconnected dimensions of digital communication. The findings suggest the existence of a positive developmental cycle in which identity construction encourages expressive practice, while growing expressive competence further strengthens students' ability to construct and maintain authentic online identities. In this sense, digital participation becomes an informal yet powerful learning experience through which students continuously cultivate communication skills that extend beyond online environments into academic, professional, and social contexts.

The study also carries important educational implications. Educators and curriculum developers may benefit from recognizing students' digital identity practices as valuable communicative resources rather than viewing them solely as extracurricular or recreational activities. Integrating reflective activities related to online communication, audience awareness, digital self-presentation, and language choices into educational settings may help bridge the gap between informal digital literacy and formal academic communication. Such approaches could foster greater student engagement while simultaneously strengthening expressive and critical communication skills.

While the findings are promising, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study was based on a relatively small sample of twenty-two respondents and employed descriptive

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ISSN P: 3006-1458
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statistical analysis, which limits the generalizability of the results. Future studies involving larger and more diverse populations could employ inferential statistical techniques, such as Pearson correlation, regression analysis, or structural equation modeling, to examine the strength and direction of the relationship more precisely. Longitudinal investigations would also provide valuable insights into how online identity construction influences self-expression skills over time and whether these effects remain stable across different stages of students' educational development.

Despite these limitations, the evidence generated by this study is consistent, coherent, and theoretically grounded. The findings strongly suggest that online identity construction is not a passive by-product of digital engagement but an active developmental process that contributes to students' communicative growth. As students navigate digital spaces, they are not merely creating online profiles; they are practicing the art of expression, refining their linguistic abilities, and developing the confidence to communicate their thoughts, perspectives, and identities effectively. Ultimately, the study concludes that online identity construction serves as a significant catalyst for the development of students' self-expression skills, highlighting the educational value of digital communication practices in contemporary learning environments.

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Figure 2. Methodological Framework

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