



# Virtual Self and Communication Style: How Do They Affect Self-Image on Social Media?

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## Abstract

The development of digital technology allows individuals to form and construct their virtual identities on social media. This study aims to analyze the influence of virtual self and communication style on self-image on social media. This research uses quantitative methods, this research involves 100 respondents. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to test the relationship between these variables. The data analysis techniques used include descriptive statistics to describe the characteristics of respondents and patterns of social media use, normality test or One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test to ensure residuals are normally distributed, multicollinearity test through Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor to ensure there is no high relationship between independent variables, and heteroscedasticity test or Glejser Test to detect residual variations that are not constant. The results showed that virtual self has a significant influence on self-image ( $p\text{-value} < 0.001$ ), which indicates that the stronger individuals build their virtual identity, the greater the influence on self-image on social media. In contrast, communication style did not show a significant effect ( $p\text{-value} = 0.160$ ). The Glejser test indicated heteroscedasticity in the model ( $p\text{-value} = 0.029$ ), so the robust standard errors method is recommended to improve the accuracy of model estimation. The findings confirm that in the digital era, self-image is more influenced by the construction of virtual identities than the communication patterns used. This research contributes to the study of digital communication and its implications for individuals in managing their digital identities more authentically and in line with social reality.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in various aspects of human life, especially in the way individuals build and display self-identity in the digital media space. Social media has become one of the main platforms that allow individuals to express themselves, interact with others, and form certain perceptions of themselves.

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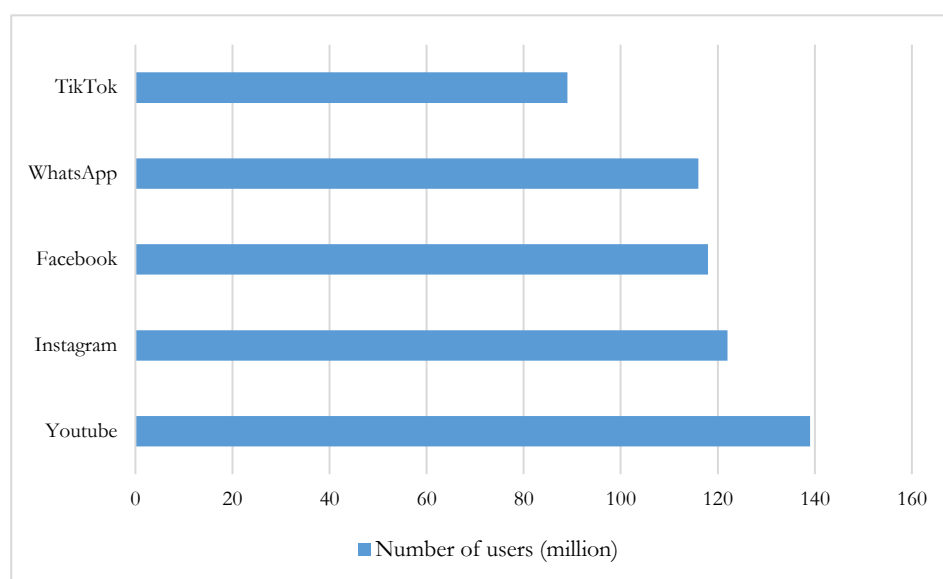
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This phenomenon is known as the virtual self, which is a representation of one's identity in cyberspace that can be different from the real identity in the real world. The concept of virtual self is not only related to how individuals create a self-image online but also how they communicate in a dynamic and constantly evolving digital environment (Fauzi et al., 2022; Muhammad, 2019; Zubaedi et al., 2021).

In the current digital era, social media such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter have become the main space for individuals to construct self-identity (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2021; Fitriani, 2021). Social media users often present the best version of themselves by crafting curated life narratives through photos, videos and texts. individuals in social life act like actors on stage, presenting themselves according to social expectations. However, in the context of social media, the distinction between real and virtual life is often blurred, creating challenges in understanding the authenticity of identities displayed online (Azhar, 2018).

According to the latest data from Databoks Katadata (2024), Indonesia has 191 million social media users, representing 73.7% of the total population. Among them, 167 million are active users (64.3% of the population), with the internet penetration rate reaching 242 million users (93.4% of the population). The most popular social media platforms include YouTube (139 million users, 53.8%), Instagram (122 million users, 47.3%), Facebook (118 million users, 45.9%), WhatsApp (116 million users, 45.2%), and TikTok (89 million users, 34.7%). The dominant age group for social media usage is 18-34 years old (54.1%), with a gender distribution that is slightly more skewed towards females (51.3%) than males (48.7%).



**Fig 1. Number of social media users in 2024**

On average, social media users in Indonesia spend around 3 hours and 14 minutes per day on various platforms, with 81% accessing them daily (Harahap, 2019; Junawan & Laugu, 2020; Supratman, 2018). Key activities undertaken on social media include photo and video sharing (81%), communication (79%), consuming news and information (73%), entertainment (68%), and online shopping (61%). This pattern of engagement highlights the central role of social media in shaping digital identity and influencing users' self-perception and communication style (Sulthan & Istiyanto, 2019).

The concept of the virtual self, introduced by Turkle, (1997), describes how individuals construct and present themselves in digital spaces, which are often different from their identities in the real world. This phenomenon has

profound implications for self-image and communication behavior, as individuals curate their online persona based on social expectations and the characteristics of the platform used. Given the increasing dominance of digital interactions, it is important to examine how the virtual self influences self-perception and communication styles among different user groups, including university students, content creators, and housewives active on social media (Jing et al., 2024).

A number of previous studies have examined how social media affects individuals' self-perception and communication. For example, social media allows individuals to manage impressions and shape identities more flexibly compared to face-to-face interactions. Other studies have shown that individuals tend to present themselves more positively on social media compared to their actual reality. However, quantitative research that specifically measures the relationship between virtual self, self-image, and communication style in Indonesia is still very limited (Safitri et al., 2021).

Moreover, this phenomenon has far-reaching social implications. From a psychological perspective, the pressure to maintain an idealized image on social media can lead to social anxiety or even digital identity disorder (Latif, 35 C.E.). Socially, social media creates new communication norms that are more interactive but also prone to distortions of reality. Meanwhile, in the economic aspect, online identity construction has become an important factor in personal branding, both for individuals seeking employment and for content creators who depend on social media for income.

Virtual self has a complex impact on individuals' self-image and communication style on social media (Munzir, 2019; Ni'amulloh Ash Shidiqie et al., 2023; Syaefulloh, 2023; Syifa & Irwansyah, 2022). According to social identity theory, individuals tend to adapt their behavior and identity to the norms that apply in certain social groups. In the digital environment, this is further reinforced by the interactive features of social media, such as the number of "likes," comments, and shares, which provide direct feedback on how one presents oneself (Sari, 2023). For example, individuals who receive a lot of appreciation for their posts tend to have higher self-confidence than those who receive little attention (Gottschalk, 2010). Conversely, pressure to maintain a certain image can lead to stress and dissatisfaction with oneself, as evidenced in studies on the impact of social media on mental health.

In addition to affecting self-image, the virtual self also contributes to changes in individual communication styles in online environments. According to Suler's (2004) Online Disinhibition Effect theory described (Muharromah & Okditazeini, 2024), individuals tend to be bolder in expressing their opinions and emotions in cyberspace compared to face-to-face communication. The anonymity and absence of nonverbal cues in digital communication allow individuals to feel freer in expression, both positively and negatively. This phenomenon can be seen in online discussions, where individuals who are usually reserved in in-person interactions can become more vocal and expressive on social media.

However, on the other hand, digital communication also brings challenges in building authentic and meaningful relationships. Many studies have shown that communication styles based on virtual interactions often lack depth compared to in-person communication. In many cases, individuals tend to present the best side of themselves without showing weaknesses or negative aspects, thus creating a picture that does not fully reflect reality. This can lead to misperceptions of others, especially in social and professional relationships that rely on online communication (Satyanandani et al., 2023).

This study is relevant because social media has become an indispensable part of modern life, where individuals from various social backgrounds and ages engage in digital interactions on a daily basis. A deeper understanding of the influence of virtual self and communication style on self-image will provide new insights in the fields of digital communication, social psychology, as well as implications for the mental well-being of social media users. Thus, this study not only contributes theoretically to the development of the concept of digital identity but also provides practical implications for social media users, communication practitioners, and policy makers in designing healthier and more sustainable digital communication strategies. To achieve these objectives, this study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method to collect data from social media users. This approach allows researchers to measure the relationship between virtual self (X1), communication style (X2), and self-image (Y) variables systematically and objectively. Statistical analysis will be used to identify patterns that emerge in the data and evaluate the extent to which virtual self and social media interaction contribute to the formation of an individual's self-image in the digital world.

This study aims to explore the influence of the virtual self on the self-image and communication style of social media users (Tobing et al., 2023). Using a quantitative approach, this study seeks to analyze the relationship between digital self-construction and real-world communication behavior, as well as provide empirical insights into the broader implications of social media engagement on identity formation and social interaction patterns. With the increasing role of social media in everyday life, this study is expected to make a meaningful contribution to understanding the dynamics of digital identity and online communication. The results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for further research in the field of digital communication, as well as provide recommendations for social media users to be wiser in building and maintaining their identities online.

## METHODS

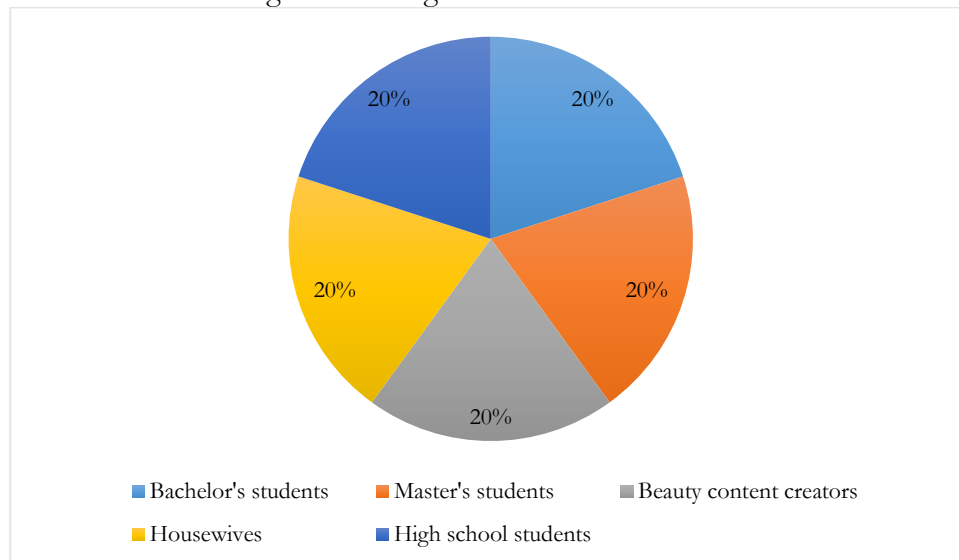
This research uses a quantitative approach with the survey method as a data collection technique. The sample in this study amounted to 100 respondents consisting of five different categories: 20 undergraduate students, 20 beauty content creators, 20 graduate students, 20 high school students, and 20 housewives who are active on social media (Engkizar et al., 2023; Iskandar et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2020). This sample selection was done to ensure variation in the representation of social media users from different social and age groups, which allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the influence of virtual self on self-image and communication style. The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling, which is a method used to select respondents based on certain characteristics relevant to the research objectives. With this technique, the selected respondents have active experience in building virtual self on social media, so that the data obtained is more in line with the variables studied.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The rapid development of social media has brought significant changes in the way individuals build self-image and communicate digitally. This study aims to examine the influence of virtual self on self-image and communication style of social media users, using a survey-based quantitative approach to 100 respondents consisting of undergraduate students, graduate students, beauty content creators, housewives, and high school students.

The rapid development of social media has created a transformation in the way individuals form self-images and interact in digital spaces. The identities displayed on social media are often different from real identities, as users have the freedom to build and manage their self-representations according to personal preferences or social expectations. In this context, the concept of virtual self becomes relevant because it reflects how individuals shape their digital identities, whether through visual uploads, personal narratives, or interaction patterns with audiences. In addition, the communication style used in interactions on social media also plays a role in shaping individuals' self-perception and the way they are accepted by the public (Turkle, 1997).

This study aims to analyze the extent to which the virtual self influences self-image, and how communication styles contribute to this dynamic. This study uses a survey-based quantitative approach by involving 100 respondents from various backgrounds, namely undergraduate students, graduate students, beauty content creators, housewives, and high school students. The selection of this group of respondents aims to gain a broader understanding of how age, profession, and level of understanding of social media can affect the way individuals build a digital self-image.



**Fig 2. Respondent category distribution**

The distribution of respondent categories in this study shows variations that reflect the diversity of social media users. Undergraduate and graduate students, for example, tend to use social media as an academic and professional tool, while beauty content creators focus more on aesthetics and visual communication strategies to build personal branding. On the other hand, housewives use social media to build social interactions and share daily experiences, while high school students mostly use digital platforms as a means of self-expression and identity search.

The ever-evolving digital era has made social media the main platform for individuals to shape and display their identities. The identity constructed in the digital space is often different from real life, creating the phenomenon of virtual self. This study analyzes the influence of virtual self and communication style on self-image on social media. A quantitative approach and multiple linear regression analysis are used to explore the extent to which both variables contribute to shaping an individual's self-image in a dynamic digital ecosystem. Understanding these dynamics is increasingly relevant as social media users display and manage their identities online.

## Normality Test

The normality test aims to ensure that the residuals in the regression model follow a normal distribution. A normal distribution of residuals is one of the important assumptions in classical linear regression analysis, as it affects the inferential validity of the model used. If the residuals are not normally distributed, then the estimation of regression coefficients and the significance of statistical tests may be less accurate.

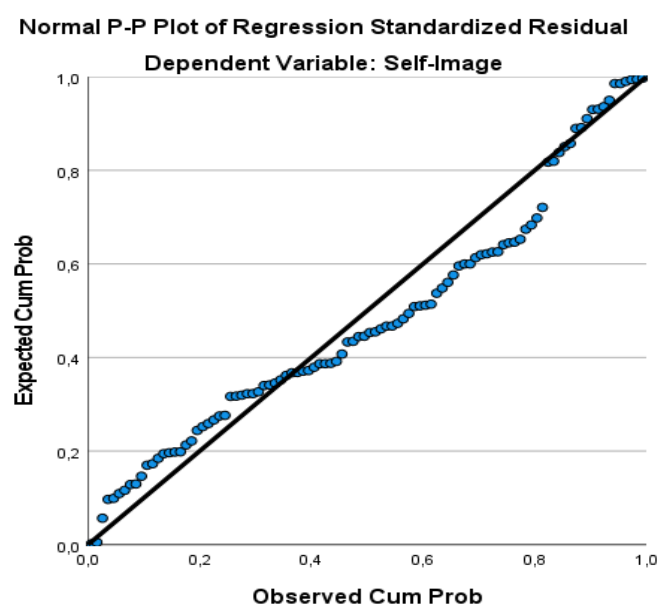
**Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test results**

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Unstandardized Residual
N	100
Mean	0.0000000
Std. Deviation	3.3318
Test Statistic	0.126
Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001

In this study, the normality test was carried out using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, which tests the hypothesis whether the residuals have a normal distribution. The analysis results show that the Test Statistic value is 0.126 with Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.001. A significance value smaller than 0.05 indicates that the residuals are not statistically normally distributed.

However, non-normal distribution of residuals is not always a major problem in regression analysis, especially if the sample size is large enough. The Central Limit Theorem states that in a large sample ( $n > 30$ ), the sampling distribution of the estimated regression coefficients will approach a normal distribution, even though the original data is not normally distributed. Therefore, even if the test results show a mismatch with the normal distribution, the regression model can still be used while still paying attention to the interpretation of the results.

Alternatively, several methods can be used to handle non-normal residual data, such as data transformation (log or square root transformation) or the use of estimation methods that are more robust to violations of the normality assumption. However, in this case, since the sample is large enough, the nonconformity of the residual distribution to normality is not considered a serious obstacle to the validity of the regression model.



**Fig 3. P-P Plot regression normality test results**



The residual normality test is an important step in multiple linear regression analysis to ensure that the distribution of errors (residuals) follows a normal pattern. Residual normality affects the accuracy of hypothesis testing and the determination of confidence intervals in the regression model. One graphical method used to assess normality is the Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals, which compares the expected cumulative probability with the observed cumulative probability.

The P-P plot graph displayed shows that most of the data points are around the diagonal line, which indicates that the residuals tend to follow a normal distribution. However, there is a slight deviation in the upper and lower tails, indicating a small deviation from normality. Nonetheless, the distribution of points that mostly follow the diagonal line indicates that the assumption of normality is not completely violated.

### Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity is a condition where there is a high correlation between independent variables in the regression model, which can cause instability in the estimation of regression coefficients and reduce the accuracy of model predictions. To identify the presence of multicollinearity, the analysis is done by looking at the Tolerance value and Variance Inflation Factor. Tolerance value measures the proportion of variability of an independent variable that cannot be explained by other independent variables, while Variance Inflation Factor shows the extent to which the variance of the regression coefficients increases due to the correlation between independent variables.

**Table 2. Multicollinearity test results**

Model	Variable	Std.				t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	-5,238	1,919			-	,008	
	Virtual self	1,179	,047	,938	25,19	2,730	,000	1,020
	communication style	,062	,044	,053	1,415	2	,160	1,020

The analysis results show that the Tolerance value for the virtual self and communication style variables is 0.980, while the Variance Inflation Factor value is 1.020. This value is within acceptable limits, where Tolerance > 0.1 and Variance Inflation Factor < 10. Based on these criteria, it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity problem in the regression model used. This indicates that each independent variable can be analyzed separately without distortion or bias due to too strong a relationship between variables.

Regression results show that virtual self has a significant influence on self-image with a regression coefficient of 1.179 ( $p < 0.001$ ), while communication style shows no significant influence ( $p = 0.160$ ). In the absence of multicollinearity, interpretation of the regression results can be done more accurately, allowing for a more valid analysis of how self-construction in digital spaces is affected by individual interactions through social media.

Therefore, the multicollinearity test results confirm that the regression model in this study is stable and does not experience distortion due to the relationship between independent variables. Therefore, the regression analysis results can be used to interpret the influence of virtual self and communication style on self-image more credibly, providing deeper insights into the dynamics of digital identity in the social media ecosystem.

### Heteroscedasticity Test

Heteroscedasticity is a condition in which the variance of residuals in a regression model is not constant, which can cause the estimation of regression parameters to be inefficient and affect the inferential validity of the model. To detect the presence of heteroscedasticity, this study uses the Glejser Test, where the absolute value of residuals is regressed against the independent variables. If the p-value of the independent variable is smaller than 0.05, then there is an indication of heteroscedasticity in the model.

**Table 3. Heteroscedasticity test results**

Model	Variable	B	Std.	Beta	t	Sig.
			Error			
1	(Constant)	-,541	1,273		-,425	,672
	Virtual self	,041	,031	,133	1,332	,186
	communication style	,064	,029	,220	2,213	,029

The analysis results show that the virtual self variable has a p value = 0.186, while the communication style variable has a p value = 0.029. Based on the significance criteria ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), the communication style variable shows heteroscedasticity in the regression model, while the virtual self does not experience this problem. This indicates that the residual variance is not completely constant, but rather changes at certain levels of the independent variable, which may affect the accuracy of the regression estimates.

The presence of heteroscedasticity in the model indicates that the classical assumptions of linear regression are not fully met, making the standard error estimates and significance tests of the regression coefficients potentially biased. To overcome this problem, it is recommended to use the robust standard errors method, which can improve estimation accuracy by correcting for non-constant residual variances. Another alternative is the use of Weighted Least Squares or Generalized Least Squares methods to reduce the effects of heteroscedasticity and improve the efficiency of the regression model. Considering the results of this test, the regression analysis in this study needs to take into account possible distortions due to heteroscedasticity, especially in the interpretation of the effect of communication style on self-image. Therefore, the use of more robust methods in estimating standard errors is a recommended step to ensure the validity of the research findings in understanding the dynamics of digital identity in social media.

### Multiple Linear Regression Test

Multiple linear regression was used in this study to examine the extent to which virtual self and communication style contribute to self-image on social media. The regression analysis results in the following equation:

**Table 4. Multiple linear regression test results**

Model	Variable	B	Std.	Beta	t	Sig.
			Error			
1	(Constant)	-5,238	1,919		-2,730	,008
	Virtual self	1,179	,047	,938	25,192	,000
	communication style	,062	,044	,053	1,415	,160

This equation shows that virtual self and communication style have a positive influence on self-image, although with different levels of contribution. The constant value (-5.238) indicates that if virtual self and communication style have no influence (zero value), then self-image tends to be negative. This



indicates that without a strong digital identity or effective communication patterns, individuals may have difficulty in building a positive self-image on social media. The coefficient of virtual self (1.179) indicates that every one unit increase in virtual self will increase self-image by 1.179, assuming other variables remain constant. This confirms that virtual identity construction plays a major role in shaping self-image in the digital world. The more consistent a person is in presenting their identity on social media, the higher their self-image in the eyes of the audience. Meanwhile, the coefficient of communication style (0.062) shows that a one-unit increase in communication style only increases self-image by 0.062. This value is relatively small compared to the virtual self, indicating that although communication plays a role in building self-image, the impact is not as great as how individuals manage their virtual identity. This could be due to the dominance of visual and narrative aspects in social media, which determine how a person is perceived more than the communication style used.

The results of this study confirm that virtual self has a more dominant influence than communication style in shaping self-image on social media. This finding is in line with previous studies that emphasize the importance of digital identity management in building social perceptions in cyberspace. In other words, individuals who are able to manage their digital persona well will more easily obtain a positive self-image, regardless of the communication style used.

However, although communication style did not show a significant effect in the regression model, this does not mean that communication is not important in digital interactions. Other factors such as the context of communication, the type of platform used, and the pattern of interaction with the audience may act as moderating variables that can strengthen the relationship between virtual self and self-image. Therefore, further research can be conducted to explore the dynamics of communication in shaping self-image on social media. In an academic and practical context, the results of this study provide important insights for individuals, digital marketers, and policy makers regarding strategies to build self-image on social media. Social media users are advised to focus more on building an authentic and consistent virtual self in order to optimally improve their self-image. In addition, effective communication strategies are still needed to strengthen audience engagement and build more meaningful social interactions.

This research shows that the virtual self is the main factor influencing self-image on social media, while communication style has a smaller influence. Therefore, in the context of social media, one's self-image is determined more by how individuals manage their virtual identities than by how they communicate. Further studies are recommended to examine other factors that may play a role in shaping self-image, such as audience engagement, social media algorithms, and the psychological aspects of individuals in building digital identities.

This study aims to analyze the influence of virtual self and communication style on self-image in social media. Along with the development of the digital era, individuals increasingly form their identities in the virtual world, which are often different from their identities in the real world. This phenomenon raises questions about how individuals present themselves and what factors influence their self-image on social media. The results of multiple linear regression analysis show that virtual self has a significant influence on self-image, with a coefficient value of 1.179 and  $p$ -value  $<0.001$ . This finding indicates that the stronger a person builds their virtual identity, the greater the impact on their self-image. In this context,

individuals who are more active in shaping their virtual self, for example through photo editing, selecting certain content, or delivering narratives that fit their digital persona, will be more able to control how they want to be seen by others.

In contrast, the communication style variable did not show a significant effect on self-image, with a coefficient value of 0.062 and  $p\text{-value} = 0.160$ . This suggests that the way a person communicates on social media, such as the formality of language, the use of emoticons, or the level of interaction, does not directly shape their self-image. Most likely, self-image is more influenced by visual aspects and content curation that reflect one's virtual identity more than verbal or written communication patterns. However, there is an indication of heteroscedasticity in this model, as shown by the Glejser test results, where the Communication style variable has a  $p\text{-value}$  of 0.029 (below 0.05). This means that there is a non-constant variation in the residuals of the model, which may affect the estimation accuracy. To overcome this problem, using the robust standard errors method can be a solution so that parameter estimates remain valid despite the presence of heteroscedasticity in the data.

Practically, the findings provide important insights for social media users and digital communication practitioners. For individuals, it is important to understand that the virtual self they actively build will greatly affect their self-image in the eyes of the public. Therefore, strategies in managing digital identities should be given more attention so that they are aligned with their real identities. Meanwhile, for researchers and practitioners in the field of communication, this study confirms that visual aspects and content curation are more dominant in shaping self-image on social media compared to the communication style used. This research shows that in the digital world, self-image is more determined by how a person builds and manages their virtual self than by how they communicate. The implication of this finding is the need for awareness in building a digital identity so that it remains authentic and does not conflict with the real identity in the real world. In addition, further research can explore other factors, such as the role of social media algorithms or the influence of digital social interactions in shaping one's self-image.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that virtual self and communication style have an influence on the formation of self-image on social media. Individuals tend to build digital identities that can be different from their real identities, both for personal branding purposes, social imaging, and self-expression needs. In this case, the virtual self acts as a digital representation constructed by users according to social preferences and expectations, while communication style determines how the identity is received by the audience on social media. Data analysis shows that virtual self has a significant influence on self-image, which means that the stronger individuals build their digital identity, the greater the impact on how they are perceived online. Meanwhile, communication style has a smaller contribution than virtual self, but still plays a role in shaping self-image, especially in the context of social interaction and message delivery in digital media. These findings confirm that social media is not only a platform for sharing information, but also a space where individuals can construct and manage their identities. Therefore, it is important for users to better understand the impact of their self-representation in the digital world, as well as be aware of the social and psychological consequences that can arise from the difference between virtual and real identities. As a practical implication.

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