



Perfectionistic Self-Presentation on Professional Networking Platforms

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Abstract

Professional networking platforms have transformed career visibility by enabling individuals to continuously display qualifications, achievements, occupational identities, affiliations, skills, recommendations, and professional narratives before audiences that may include colleagues, recruiters, employers, clients, and competitors. Although strategic self-presentation is a normal feature of professional communication, digitally mediated career environments may create stronger pressure to appear consistently accomplished, competent, productive, and free from professional shortcomings. The present study examines perfectionistic self-presentation on professional networking platforms, defined as the tendency to publicly promote an image of professional flawlessness while concealing, minimizing, or avoiding disclosure of perceived deficiencies. The conceptualization is grounded in Hewitt and colleagues' model of perfectionistic self-presentation, which distinguishes perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection. Their foundational research characterized perfectionistic self-presentation as a maladaptive interpersonal style associated with psychological distress.

Because no original participant dataset was supplied, the study uses a simulation-based quantitative design involving 480 synthetic professional-networking users. Perfectionistic self-presentation, professional authenticity strain, upward career comparison, impression-management pressure, and psychological well-being were modeled as related but distinct constructs. The simulated analysis indicates that mean professional authenticity strain increases from 40.05 among cases with low perfectionistic self-presentation to 77.01 among cases with very high perfectionistic self-presentation. The analysis does not represent observed prevalence or causal effects. Rather, it demonstrates a theoretically specified pathway in which repeated efforts to maintain a flawless professional identity may increase discrepancies between experienced and displayed professional selves.

The model is supported by earlier evidence showing that perfectionistic self-presentation can mediate the relationship between perfectionistic concerns and reduced subjective well-being, while professional social-networking research has identified associations between frequent LinkedIn use and depression and anxiety among young adults. Research published in 2021 also indicates that exposure to others' career-related social-media posts can increase career frustration through social comparison. The present study therefore argues that professional networking platforms may become psychologically demanding when career visibility is combined with perfectionistic self-monitoring, upward comparison, and fear that ordinary imperfections will damage professional credibility. The study concludes that sustainable professional networking should favor accurate competence signaling, contextualized



achievement communication, and professionally appropriate authenticity rather than continuous performance of an idealized career identity.

Keywords: perfectionistic self-presentation; professional networking platforms; LinkedIn; impression management; professional identity; social comparison; authenticity; career anxiety

1. Introduction

Professional identity was once presented primarily through relatively bounded artifacts such as résumés, curriculum vitae documents, formal interviews, business cards, conference participation, and workplace interaction. Professional networking platforms have expanded this process into a persistent digital environment in which occupational identity can be publicly edited, updated, compared, endorsed, searched, and evaluated. LinkedIn is a particularly important example because professional profiles function simultaneously as networking interfaces, career histories, public reputational records, and vehicles for impression management. Paliszkievicz and Mądra-Sawicka described LinkedIn self-presentation within the broader process of impression management, emphasizing that individuals can strategically manage information in order to influence how others perceive their professional identity. The distinction between a résumé submitted to one employer and a continuously visible professional profile is psychologically important: the latter potentially converts professional identity management from an occasional task into an ongoing performance.

Self-presentation in itself is neither unusual nor inherently maladaptive. Professionals legitimately select information that is relevant to occupational goals, emphasize appropriate competencies, and communicate achievements to audiences that lack complete information about their abilities. The psychological issue emerges when selective professional presentation develops into perfectionistic self-presentation. Hewitt and colleagues conceptualized perfectionistic self-presentation as an interpersonal expressive style involving three related tendencies: actively displaying perfection, concealing visible imperfections, and avoiding disclosure of personal deficiencies. Their work demonstrated that this construct is distinct from simply maintaining high personal standards and is associated with psychological distress. In professional-networking environments, these tendencies may appear as persistent achievement signaling, reluctance to discuss setbacks, excessive editing of professional narratives, avoidance of uncertain opinions, strategic omission of periods of underperformance, or concern that every visible post contributes to an evaluative record.

Professional networking platforms may intensify this process because users are repeatedly exposed to highly selected representations of other people's careers. Promotions, awards, degrees, certifications, speaking engagements, successful projects, publications, business milestones, and job transitions are naturally more likely to become visible than routine frustration, rejected applications, stalled projects, difficult supervision, career uncertainty, or unsuccessful initiatives. This asymmetric visibility creates a favorable environment for upward career comparison. Fukubayashi and colleagues found that daily exposure to career-related social-media posts influenced perceptions and feelings about one's own career through social comparison; upward comparison was associated with greater career frustration. Earlier professional-networking research also noted that seeing peers' accomplishments and career updates could plausibly contribute to comparison and emotional distress among LinkedIn users.



The psychological consequences of professional online visibility may therefore extend beyond ordinary networking. Jones and colleagues examined LinkedIn use in a nationally representative sample of 1,780 U.S. young adults and reported associations between frequency of professional social-networking use and depression and anxiety.

Their cross-sectional design did not establish causality, but the study established professional social networking as a legitimate context for examining emotional distress rather than assuming that career-oriented social media is psychologically neutral. Related social-media research further indicates that authentic self-expression is positively associated with well-being, whereas false or heavily distorted self-presentation can carry psychological costs. Bailey and colleagues found evidence connecting authentic self-expression on social media with greater subjective well-being, while Mun and Kim reported that false self-presentation on Instagram was positively associated with depression and post-deletion behavior. Although general social-media platforms differ from professional networking sites, these findings support examination of the psychological distance between displayed and experienced identity.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To Examine Perfectionistic Self-Presentation in Professional Digital Identity

The first objective is to conceptualize how the established dimensions of perfectionistic self-presentation may operate in career-oriented networking environments. Perfectionistic self-promotion is represented by efforts to communicate exceptional competence and accomplishment; nondisplay of imperfection concerns efforts to prevent observable errors or weaknesses; and nondisclosure of imperfection concerns reluctance to acknowledge uncertainty, setbacks, limitations, or professional difficulties. This operationalization follows the multidimensional model introduced by Hewitt and colleagues.

2.2 To Assess Professional Authenticity Strain and Career Comparison

The second objective is to examine whether increasing perfectionistic self-presentation is theoretically associated with greater professional authenticity strain, defined as psychological tension produced when the professionally displayed self becomes increasingly narrower, more idealized, or more flawless than the individual's experienced occupational identity. The study also considers upward career comparison because career-related social-media exposure has been shown to influence career frustration through comparison processes.

2.3 To Develop a Psychologically Sustainable Professional-Networking Framework

The third objective is to distinguish strategic professional communication from psychologically costly perfectionistic performance. The proposed model does not discourage achievement communication, personal branding, or professional visibility. Instead, it identifies conditions under which professional impression management may become rigid, self-evaluative, and psychologically burdensome.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Perfectionistic Self-Presentation and Psychological Functioning

Perfectionism is multidimensional, and an important distinction exists between privately held perfectionistic standards and interpersonal attempts to appear perfect before other people. Hewitt and colleagues' perfectionistic self-presentation model was developed specifically to capture the expressive and interpersonal dimensions of perfectionism. Their research identified perfectionistic self-promotion, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection as related but distinguishable components of a broader self-presentational style. This distinction is highly relevant to professional platforms because such environments reward visibility while simultaneously exposing users to evaluation.

Perfectionistic self-promotion involves actively communicating a flawless or exceptionally competent image. In a professional environment, this could include disproportionate emphasis on achievements, exceptional productivity, awards, credentials, leadership roles, prestigious collaborations, or success narratives. Such presentation does not necessarily involve factual deception. Perfectionistic self-presentation can arise through selective emphasis: true achievements are made highly visible while ordinary professional experiences disappear from the public narrative.

Nondisplay of imperfection has a different function. Here, the principal concern is preventing others from observing mistakes or shortcomings. A professional high in this dimension may repeatedly revise posts, avoid participating in discussions without complete certainty, experience disproportionate discomfort over minor public errors, or remove material that could be interpreted negatively. Nondisclosure of imperfection goes further by discouraging acknowledgment of professional difficulty. Unsuccessful applications, skill gaps, rejected papers, unsuccessful entrepreneurial attempts, stalled projects, and career uncertainty may remain absent from a professional identity even when they constitute normal parts of occupational development.

Longitudinal evidence supports the relevance of these processes to well-being. Mackinnon and Sherry followed young adults across three waves and found that perfectionistic self-presentation mediated the relationship between perfectionistic concerns and subjective well-being. This result is particularly useful for the current model because it suggests that perfectionistic beliefs may become psychologically consequential partly through the manner in which individuals attempt to manage their interpersonal presentation. A professional platform could provide a highly visible environment for this characteristic adaptation.

Research on perfectionism and subjective well-being also indicates that maladaptive discrepancy-related perfectionism is negatively related to well-being. Wang, Huang, and Xiao reported that maladaptive perfectionistic discrepancy was negatively associated with subjective well-being, with negative problem orientation providing one explanatory pathway. These findings support a distinction between healthy commitment to professional quality and psychologically costly preoccupation with appearing without deficiency.

3.2 Professional Networking, Impression Management, and Digital Career Identity

Professional networking platforms are designed around occupational visibility. Users construct profiles, describe work histories, list skills and achievements, build networks, interact with career-related material, and remain discoverable to potential professional audiences. Paliszkievicz and Mądra-Sawicka



explicitly framed LinkedIn activity as a form of impression management in which identity presentation can influence business and professional perceptions. The platform context therefore differs from anonymous discussion environments because the displayed identity is tied directly to occupational reputation.

This persistent visibility can create legitimate professional advantages while simultaneously encouraging continuous self-monitoring. A professional profile must often operate across multiple audiences: current colleagues, former classmates, recruiters, managers, clients, competitors, students, collaborators, and future employers may all observe the same identity. An achievement that appears appropriately confident to one audience may appear self-promotional to another, while acknowledgment of uncertainty may appear authentic to one reader and insufficiently authoritative to another. Such audience ambiguity makes professional self-presentation a cognitively demanding form of identity management.

Jones and colleagues' 2016 study provides direct evidence that professional networking should be examined in psychological research. Their nationally representative study of U.S. young adults evaluated the relationship between LinkedIn use frequency and emotional distress and identified associations with depression and anxiety. The study did not establish that LinkedIn causes emotional distress, and reverse or bidirectional relationships remained possible. Nevertheless, it challenged the assumption that professional networking is simply instrumental career activity without emotional consequences.

The architecture of professional networking may be particularly relevant because professional accomplishments are socially comparable. A user's position, employer, education, certifications, years of experience, promotions, projects, and visible network can become comparison cues. Unlike many lifestyle comparisons, career comparisons can also appear materially consequential because users may believe that others' visible success signals influence recruitment and professional opportunity. The perceived stakes of self-presentation may therefore be higher than on platforms used predominantly for entertainment or casual interaction.

3.3 Social Comparison, Authenticity, and Psychological Strain

Social comparison provides an important mechanism linking professional networking with perfectionistic self-presentation. Fukubayashi and colleagues examined career-related comparison processes in social-media environments and found that exposure to others' career posts could increase career frustration through upward social comparison. The study is especially relevant because it moves beyond appearance-based comparison and demonstrates that digitally mediated comparison can directly influence the way individuals evaluate their career progress.

Upward professional comparisons are not always harmful. Seeing a peer's success may provide information, motivation, mentorship opportunities, or evidence that a desired career path is achievable. The psychological problem arises when the comparison target is interpreted primarily as evidence of personal inadequacy. A user who repeatedly sees promotions, prestigious appointments, publications, funding announcements, awards, and entrepreneurial successes may incorrectly infer that visible professional success represents the ordinary baseline against which personal progress should be evaluated.



Perfectionistic self-presentation can intensify this process through reciprocal curation. Individuals exposed to idealized professional displays may become more motivated to create equally favorable representations of themselves. Their own polished presentations then become comparison material for other users. The resulting system does not require anyone to fabricate achievements; selective visibility alone can create an environment in which success is overrepresented and ordinary professional difficulty is underrepresented.

Authenticity research provides a counterpoint. Bailey and colleagues reported that authentic self-expression on social media was associated with greater subjective well-being. In contrast, Mun and Kim found that false self-presentation was associated with depression and deletion behavior in an Instagram sample, while need for approval predicted greater false self-presentation. These platforms and populations differ from professional networking environments, so the findings cannot be transferred mechanically. They nevertheless support the broader proposition that maintaining a significant discrepancy between experienced and displayed identity may carry psychological consequences.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Analytical Framework

The study adopts a simulation-based explanatory quantitative design. No LinkedIn users or other professional-networking users were recruited, no questionnaire was administered, and no platform data were collected. Simulation was used to demonstrate the structure of a future empirical study without presenting fabricated responses as real observations.

A synthetic dataset containing 480 professional-networking user cases was generated. Cases were divided equally among four levels of perfectionistic self-presentation: low, moderate, high, and very high. The simulation assumes variation within every category because professional authenticity strain is unlikely to be determined solely by perfectionistic tendencies.

The primary explanatory construct is perfectionistic self-presentation. Professional authenticity strain is the principal outcome. Upward career comparison and impression-management pressure are treated as potential intermediate processes, while professional self-esteem and psychological well-being are proposed as downstream outcomes.

4.2 Operationalization of Core Constructs

Perfectionistic self-presentation was conceptually informed by Hewitt and colleagues' established three-dimensional model. The present simulation does not claim to reproduce scores from the original Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale. Instead, the model adapts its theoretical dimensions to the context of professional digital identity.

Table 1: Operational Framework for the Proposed Study

Construct	Proposed Operational Definition	Scale	Analytical Role
Perfectionistic Self-Presentation	Pressure to appear exceptionally competent while concealing professional limitations	1–7	Primary predictor
Perfectionistic Self-Promotion	Active emphasis on accomplishments, expertise, productivity, and professional distinction	1–5	Dimension
Nondisplay of Imperfection	Effort to prevent visible mistakes, uncertainty, or professionally unfavorable cues	1–5	Dimension
Nondisclosure of Imperfection	Reluctance to acknowledge setbacks, limitations, rejection, or professional difficulty	1–5	Dimension
Upward Career Comparison	Frequency of evaluating one's career against apparently more successful professionals	1–5	Proposed mediator
Professional Authenticity Strain	Tension caused by discrepancy between experienced professional identity and publicly displayed identity	0–100	Primary outcome
Psychological Well-Being	General positive psychological functioning in relation to career identity	0–100	Secondary outcome

4.3 Simulation and Analytical Procedure

The simulation generated professional authenticity-strain distributions around progressively higher means as perfectionistic self-presentation increased. The group means were not copied from any previous empirical study and therefore should not be interpreted as estimated population parameters. Descriptive analysis was preferred over inferential significance testing because hypothesis tests conducted on deliberately generated observations would not provide real evidence. Means, medians, standard deviations, and distribution patterns were examined. A violin plot was selected because it displays not merely average strain but the entire simulated distribution within each self-presentation category.

A future empirical investigation should recruit active professional-networking users and measure actual platform behavior, perfectionistic self-presentation, frequency of achievement-oriented posting, deletion or revision behavior, career comparison, subjective professional authenticity, and mental well-being. Longitudinal data would be particularly valuable because the direction of influence between

platform engagement and psychological strain cannot be established through cross-sectional designs, a limitation also relevant to earlier LinkedIn distress research.

5. Analysis

5.1 Perfectionistic Self-Presentation and Professional Authenticity Strain

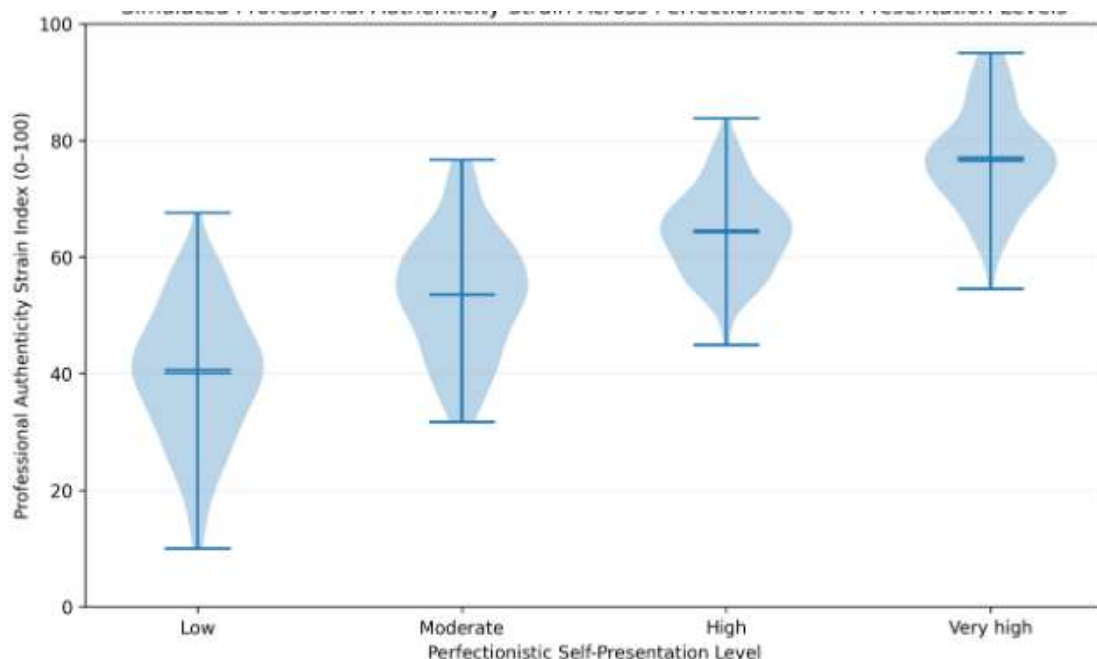
The simulated analysis demonstrates a progressive increase in professional authenticity strain across perfectionistic self-presentation categories. The mean strain score increases from 40.05 in the low group to 53.56 in the moderate group, 64.29 in the high group, and 77.01 among cases represented as very high in perfectionistic self-presentation.

Table 2: Simulated Professional Authenticity Strain Across Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Levels

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation	Simulated Cases	Mean Authenticity Strain	Median	Standard Deviation
Low	120	40.05	40.65	11.59
Moderate	120	53.56	53.46	10.47
High	120	64.29	64.51	7.43
Very High	120	77.01	76.54	8.48

5.2 Distribution of Authenticity Strain

Graph 1: Simulated Professional Authenticity Strain Across Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Levels





The violin plot shows the simulated distribution of professional authenticity strain within each level of perfectionistic self-presentation. The distributions shift progressively upward, but meaningful overlap remains between adjacent categories. This overlap is theoretically important because a person may engage in substantial professional self-presentation without experiencing severe psychological strain, while another user may experience considerable strain at a lower level of outward presentation.

The graph therefore represents perfectionistic self-presentation as a risk-related tendency rather than a deterministic condition. Professional networking outcomes are likely to depend on additional factors including employment security, current career transitions, self-esteem, occupational competition, platform-use intensity, professional norms, perceived audience expectations, and availability of supportive offline relationships.

5.3 Proposed Career-Comparison and Impression-Management Pathways

The first proposed mechanism is upward career comparison. Professional platforms expose users to highly visible career markers, and 2021 evidence indicates that upward comparison with career-related social-media content can increase career frustration. An individual who interprets these visible achievements as normative may conclude that a similarly impressive public record is required in order to remain professionally competitive.

The second pathway is impression-management pressure. Professional networking requires users to consider how occupational audiences may evaluate visible material. Paliszkievicz and Mądra-Sawicka explicitly identified LinkedIn as an environment in which impression management and self-presentation shape professional identity. For perfectionistically oriented individuals, ordinary reputation management may therefore escalate into persistent concern about displaying only professionally favorable information.

The third pathway is authenticity discrepancy. As the distance between experienced and displayed professional identity increases, users may need to devote greater effort to maintaining consistency in their public image. Evidence from general social-media environments indicates that authenticity is positively associated with well-being, while false self-presentation may be associated with negative psychological outcomes. The proposed professional authenticity-strain construct is intended to test whether a comparable process occurs in career-oriented digital environments.

6. Discussion

6.1 From Professional Visibility to Perfectionistic Performance

Professional networking platforms create legitimate opportunities for individuals to communicate expertise, discover employment, build relationships, and make their work visible. The psychological concern identified in the present study is therefore not professional self-presentation itself. A carefully written profile, strategic portfolio, or achievement announcement may accurately communicate information that relevant professional audiences need. The distinction lies between strategic visibility and perfectionistic visibility.

Strategic visibility asks what information is relevant and accurate. Perfectionistic visibility asks whether any information might make the individual appear less competent, less successful, or less accomplished than other professionals. The latter standard is substantially more difficult to satisfy

because normal careers include periods of uncertainty, rejected applications, unsuccessful projects, learning, skill gaps, changing priorities, and uneven productivity. When professional credibility becomes psychologically dependent on hiding these realities, self-presentation can become a continuous protective activity.

Hewitt and colleagues' theoretical distinction between self-promotion, nondisplay, and nondisclosure of imperfection helps explain this process. A user may not simply advertise achievements but become increasingly reluctant to engage unless success can be guaranteed. This could potentially reduce exploratory professional behavior. Someone afraid of visible imperfection may hesitate to discuss emerging ideas, request assistance, ask elementary questions, or publicly acknowledge that a project did not work as intended. Paradoxically, an effort to appear permanently competent could therefore reduce opportunities for learning and authentic professional connection.

6.2 Career Comparison, Achievement Visibility, and Authenticity Strain

Professional platforms make career comparison exceptionally convenient. Previously, an individual might have known the occupational progress of a relatively small group of colleagues. Digital networking creates access to achievements from hundreds or thousands of professionals across organizations, cities, and countries. The resulting reference group may be much larger and more selective than a person's immediate professional environment.

Fukubayashi and colleagues provide direct evidence that this matters psychologically. Their 2021 research showed that social-media exposure can affect career frustration through social comparison, including within-person daily processes. The relevant implication for perfectionistic self-presentation is reciprocal: seeing exceptional careers may increase the perceived need to display an exceptional career. This process can generate a curation loop. Professional A observes the carefully selected accomplishments of Professional B and experiences upward comparison. Professional A then increases the selectivity of their own presentation in response. Professional C observes Professional A's polished identity and makes another upward comparison. No participant needs to intentionally deceive anyone for the aggregate environment to become unrealistically achievement-dense. Normal failure, uncertainty, and gradual development become systematically less visible.

6.3 Toward Sustainable Professional Self-Presentation

The practical implication is not that professionals should publicly disclose every failure or abandon personal branding. Professional contexts legitimately require discretion, relevance, and audience awareness. Professional authenticity does not mean unrestricted self-disclosure. A sustainable approach instead requires correspondence between what is displayed and what is genuinely supportable.

Achievement communication can remain selective while avoiding artificial certainty.

people's daily occupational experiences. Fukubayashi and colleagues' findings on career comparison suggest that the interpretation of others' career posts matters for career frustration. Individuals may therefore benefit from evaluating professional comparison in terms of information and learning rather than global self-worth.

Organizations and universities also have a role. Career-development programs frequently encourage students and professionals to “build a personal brand,” yet such advice can unintentionally



imply that employability depends on continuous public performance. Training should distinguish evidence-based professional visibility from exaggerated self-promotion. Users should be encouraged to document verifiable achievements, describe contributions accurately, avoid misleading competence claims, and view professional networking as one career resource rather than a permanent public ranking system.

These recommendations are particularly important because professional-networking use and emotional distress have already been linked in observational research. Jones and colleagues' findings do not establish that LinkedIn causes anxiety or depression, but they demonstrate that professional networking and emotional health should be considered together rather than treated as unrelated domains. Future research should determine whether perfectionistic self-presentation explains part of this association.

7. Conclusion

Professional networking platforms have extended professional identity from a relatively episodic presentation into a persistent digital performance. This change creates considerable benefits for visibility, networking, career mobility, and knowledge exchange, but it also creates conditions in which some users may feel pressure to maintain a consistently favorable occupational image. The present study argues that perfectionistic self-presentation provides a useful framework for understanding when professional identity management becomes psychologically demanding.

The conceptual model distinguishes three processes: promoting an image of professional perfection, preventing visible evidence of imperfection, and avoiding disclosure of professional limitations. These dimensions originate in established perfectionistic self-presentation theory and have been associated with psychological distress. Longitudinal evidence further indicates that perfectionistic self-presentation can help explain how perfectionistic concerns contribute to lower subjective well-being. Applying this framework to professional networking therefore provides a theoretically grounded extension rather than treating online career behavior as an entirely new psychological phenomenon.

The simulated findings demonstrate the proposed relationship transparently. Mean professional authenticity strain increases from 40.05 in the low perfectionistic self-presentation condition to 77.01 in the very-high condition. These numbers are synthetic and should not be reported as observed effect sizes. Their purpose is to illustrate a model suitable for future empirical testing. The distributional analysis also demonstrates that high professional visibility need not produce identical outcomes across individuals; psychological consequences are likely to depend on how users interpret evaluation, comparison, and professional imperfection.

Career-related social comparison provides an especially important explanatory pathway. Research available through 2021 indicates that exposure to others' career-related social-media content can increase career frustration through upward comparison. Professional networking may therefore become self-reinforcing: curated success encourages comparison, comparison increases self-presentational pressure, and intensified curation creates additional comparison material for others. Recognizing this mechanism can help distinguish productive professional inspiration from psychologically costly comparative evaluation.



Future empirical studies should use longitudinal designs, behavioral platform data, and validated perfectionistic self-presentation measures to determine whether professional authenticity strain predicts anxiety, career dissatisfaction, disengagement, compulsive profile monitoring, or reluctance to disclose uncertainty. Experimental work could also test whether exposure to exclusively achievement-focused profiles produces different outcomes from exposure to professionally realistic profiles containing both accomplishment and contextualized developmental experiences.

The central implication is that professional credibility does not require a performance of flawlessness. Sustainable professional networking depends on accurate competence signaling, appropriate audience management, ethical self-promotion, and sufficient psychological flexibility to acknowledge that professional development naturally includes unfinished work, learning, revision, rejection, and uncertainty. A credible professional identity can be ambitious without being perfect, visible without being performative, and strategically presented without becoming psychologically disconnected from the person whose career it represents.

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