



# English Speaking Anxiety in the Age of Social Media: A Study among Undergraduate Learners

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*Abstract:* The rapid growth of social media has significantly influenced communication practices among undergraduate learners in the contemporary digital age. While social media platforms provide greater exposure to English language communication and interactive learning opportunities, they also contribute to communication anxiety, self-comparison, and psychological pressure among students. The present study examines the relationship between social media usage and English speaking anxiety among undergraduate learners. The research adopts a descriptive survey method and is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire prepared using Google Forms and distributed among 50 undergraduate students through official student communication groups. Secondary data was collected from books, journal articles, and existing academic studies related to communicative English, language anxiety, and digital communication. The findings reveal that social media functions both as supportive and challenging space for learners. While it helps improve vocabulary, pronunciation, and communicative confidence, it may also encourage informal communication habits, anxiety, frustration, and self-consciousness. The study concludes that balanced and conscious use of social media, combined with supportive communicative practices, can help reduce English speaking anxiety among learners.

**Key Words** - Social Media, English Speaking Anxiety, Communicative English, Language Anxiety, Undergraduate Learners, Digital Communication, Communication Anxiety

## I. INTRODUCTION

English has emerged as one of the most influential global languages in the contemporary world. It functions not only as a medium of academic communication but also as an essential tool for professional, technological, and international interaction. In countries like India, English plays a significant role in higher education, employment opportunities, and social mobility. Despite years of formal education, many undergraduate students experience difficulties while speaking English confidently in public or academic settings. One of the major reasons behind this issue is English speaking anxiety, which negatively affects fluency, confidence, pronunciation, and overall communication performance.

Speaking anxiety is a psychological condition in which learners experience nervousness, hesitation, fear, and lack of confidence while communicating in a second language. Foreign language anxiety has become an important area of research in language learning studies because emotional and psychological barriers often affect learners more than linguistic knowledge itself. Many students possess adequate vocabulary and grammatical understanding but fail to communicate effectively due to fear of mistakes and fear of judgment.

In the twenty-first century, the rapid growth of digital communication and social networking platforms has introduced a new dimension to language learning. Social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and X (Twitter) have become integral parts of students' daily lives. These platforms expose learners to English content through videos, captions, reels, podcasts, and online interactions. Consequently, students are constantly engaging with English language materials outside the traditional classroom environment.

On one hand, social media provides opportunities for informal learning, vocabulary development, listening exposure, and communication practice. Learners can interact with global audiences, watch educational content, and improve pronunciation through digital media. On the other hand, excessive use of social media may also create psychological pressure. Constant comparison with others, fear of negative comments, unrealistic self-presentation, and preference for online communication over real-life interaction may contribute to increased speaking anxiety among learners.

The present study attempts to explore this dual role of social media in shaping English speaking anxiety among undergraduate learners. It aims to examine whether social media acts as a supportive learning tool or whether it indirectly increases anxiety and emotional pressure in communication. By analyzing the responses collected from undergraduate students, the study seeks to understand how digital communication environments influence confidence, fluency, and speaking behavior in English.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between language learning and psychological factors has been widely discussed by researchers in the field of second language acquisition. Among the various emotional barriers affecting learners, language anxiety has received considerable academic attention. Researchers have emphasized that emotional and affective factors significantly influence communication performance, classroom participation, and language acquisition.

One of the foundational studies in this area was conducted by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), who introduced the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. According to them, language anxiety consists of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Their theory explains that many learners experience nervousness and psychological discomfort while speaking in a foreign language due to fear of making mistakes and being judged by others. This theory has become one of the most influential frameworks in understanding speaking anxiety among language learners.

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis also highlights the importance of emotional conditions in language acquisition. According to Krashen, factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and low motivation create an "affective filter" that blocks language input from being effectively processed by learners. Even when students receive adequate exposure to language, high levels of anxiety may reduce learning efficiency and communication confidence.

Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) argued that anxiety directly affects cognitive processing in second language learning. They stated that anxious learners often experience difficulties in concentration, memory retention, and spontaneous communication. Anxiety not only affects classroom performance but also reduces learners' willingness to communicate in real-life situations.

Brown (2007) emphasized that successful language learning depends on both linguistic competence and emotional readiness. According to him, learners perform better when they are placed in supportive and confidence-building learning environments. Young (1991) further suggested that teachers should create low-anxiety classroom settings to encourage active participation and reduce communication fear.

With the rise of digital technology, researchers have increasingly focused on the impact of social media on language learning. Crystal (2006) explained that internet-based communication has transformed language practices globally. Social networking platforms encourage informal and rapid communication, which influences vocabulary use, writing style, and communication behavior.

Kabilan et al. (2010) observed that Facebook and other social media platforms can function as effective environments for English language learning. Their research found that students often improve vocabulary, reading habits, and confidence through online interaction. Blattner and Fiori (2009) also argued that virtual communication platforms provide authentic opportunities for second language exposure and collaborative learning.

However, researchers have also identified the negative psychological effects of social media. Excessive digital engagement may increase self-comparison, emotional insecurity, and dependence on online communication. Students often feel more comfortable communicating through text messages or online comments than in face-to-face speaking situations. Such dependence may reduce real-life communication confidence and increase speaking anxiety.

The present study is based on these theoretical and technological perspectives. It attempts to analyze how social media simultaneously functions as a language-learning resource and a source of psychological pressure among undergraduate learners.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the relationship between social media usage and English speaking anxiety.
- To identify major causes of speaking anxiety among undergraduate learners.
- To analyze the impact of social media on communication behavior.
- To study the positive and negative effects of digital communication.
- To suggest measures for reducing speaking anxiety.

### IV. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to 50 undergraduate students and focuses on selected aspects of English speaking anxiety and social media usage. The findings are based on self-reported responses collected through Google Forms and may not be generalized to larger populations. The study does not include experimental or longitudinal data analysis.

### V. Research Methodology

This study follows a descriptive survey design. Primary data was collected using an 18-item structured questionnaire (Appendix-A) distributed among 50 undergraduate students. Some questions allowed multiple responses to capture varied behavioral patterns.

Secondary data was collected from academic books and peer-reviewed journals related to language anxiety and digital communication (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2001).

The study is theoretically grounded in:

- Foreign Language Anxiety theory (Horwitz et al., 1986)
- Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982)
- Language anxiety cognitive processing model (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994)

### VI. Data Analysis and Discussion

The present study collected responses (Appendix-B) from 50 undergraduate students through a structured Google Form questionnaire consisting of 18 questions. The responses were analyzed through frequency and percentage calculations in order to identify patterns related to social media usage and English speaking anxiety.

The findings reveal that social media usage among undergraduate students is extremely high. A large majority of respondents reported regular engagement with platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. This indicates that digital communication has become a significant part of students' daily academic and social lives. Most respondents also reported spending between one to five hours daily on social media platforms, reflecting strong dependence on digital interaction.

One of the important findings of the study is that students perceive social media as beneficial for English language learning. Many participants agreed that social media improves vocabulary, pronunciation exposure, listening skills, and communication confidence. Educational videos, podcasts, subtitles, motivational content, and online interactions contribute to informal language acquisition outside classroom settings.

However, the study also reveals that a substantial proportion of students experience anxiety while speaking English in real-life communication situations. Many respondents admitted that they feel nervous while speaking publicly, particularly in academic or formal environments. Fear of grammatical mistakes, pronunciation errors, and negative evaluation were identified as major causes of anxiety. These findings strongly support the theories proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), who argued that fear and self-consciousness significantly affect communication performance.

The responses further indicate that students are more comfortable communicating online than in face-to-face interaction. This suggests that social media may create a psychologically safer environment for communication because learners have more time to think, edit, and respond. However, excessive preference for online communication may weaken spontaneous speaking confidence in real-life situations.

Another important observation is the influence of social comparison on learners' emotional conditions. Many students reported experiencing frustration or self-comparison while using social media. Exposure to idealized online personalities, fluent speakers, and highly edited content may create feelings of inferiority among learners. Such emotional pressure can negatively affect confidence and increase communication anxiety.

The study therefore demonstrates the dual nature of social media. On one side, it functions as an accessible and engaging platform for language exposure and communication practice. On the other side, it contributes to psychological pressure, self-comparison, and anxiety among learners. The impact of social media depends largely on how students use digital platforms and how educational institutions guide them toward productive and balanced engagement.

## **VII. Findings**

The study reveals that social media usage among undergraduate learners is extremely high, with the majority of respondents actively using platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube on a daily basis. Most participants reported spending between one to five hours per day on social media, indicating the significant role of digital communication in students' academic and personal lives.

The findings also indicate that social media contributes positively to English language learning in several ways. Many students agreed that exposure to English videos, online discussions, subtitles, educational content, and digital interactions helps improve vocabulary, pronunciation, listening skills, and communication confidence. Students are increasingly relying on online platforms as informal learning environments outside the traditional classroom setting.

However, the research also identifies the negative psychological impact of social media on learners. A considerable number of respondents reported experiencing English speaking anxiety during face-to-face communication. Fear of grammatical mistakes, pronunciation errors, and negative judgment were identified as major causes of anxiety among undergraduate learners.

Another significant finding is that many students feel more comfortable communicating online than in direct interpersonal interaction. This suggests that digital communication provides a psychologically safer environment where learners can edit and control their responses before interacting.

The study further reveals that social comparison through social media contributes to frustration, emotional insecurity, and reduced confidence among students. Exposure to fluent speakers, idealized

online personalities, and highly curated digital content may negatively affect learners' self-confidence and increase communication pressure.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that social media has a dual impact on undergraduate learners. While it serves as a useful platform for English language exposure and communication practice, it also contributes to emotional pressure and speaking anxiety when used excessively or uncritically.

### **VIII. Suggestions and Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions may be proposed to reduce English speaking anxiety among undergraduate learners and encourage healthier use of social media for educational purposes.

Firstly, educational institutions should create supportive and learner-friendly classroom environments that encourage students to participate in speaking activities without fear of criticism or humiliation. Teachers should focus on confidence-building methods rather than excessive error correction during communication practice.

Secondly, regular interactive activities such as group discussions, classroom presentations, debates, role-play sessions, and language workshops should be introduced to improve students' speaking confidence and reduce hesitation. Continuous speaking practice can gradually minimize fear and improve fluency.

Thirdly, students should be guided to use social media productively for language learning purposes. Educational videos, podcasts, online lectures, pronunciation tutorials, and English discussion groups can help learners improve communication skills in engaging and accessible ways.

The study also recommends conducting awareness programs regarding the negative psychological effects of excessive social media comparison. Students should be encouraged to maintain balanced digital habits and avoid unhealthy comparison with unrealistic online representations.

Furthermore, institutions may organize counseling sessions, communication skill workshops, and motivational seminars to address speaking anxiety and emotional stress among learners. Psychological support systems can play an important role in improving learners' confidence and participation.

Finally, both teachers and students should recognize that language learning is a gradual process that requires patience, encouragement, and continuous practice. Creating a positive and supportive learning atmosphere can significantly reduce anxiety and improve communication effectiveness among undergraduate learners.

### **IX. Conclusion**

The present study concludes that social media has both positive and negative effects on English speaking anxiety among undergraduate learners. In the contemporary digital age, social networking platforms have become powerful tools for communication, learning, and self-expression. Students are continuously exposed to English language content through videos, online discussions, educational pages, and digital interactions. Such exposure contributes to vocabulary development, listening practice, and increased familiarity with English communication.

At the same time, the findings of the study reveal that excessive engagement with social media may create emotional and psychological challenges among learners. Fear of judgment, comparison with fluent speakers, lack of confidence, and preference for online communication contribute significantly to speaking anxiety. Many learners feel comfortable expressing themselves through digital platforms but hesitate during real-life interaction and public speaking situations.

The research also confirms that language anxiety is not only a linguistic issue but also a psychological and social phenomenon. Emotional conditions, confidence levels, and communication environments play crucial roles in language learning outcomes. The theories proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), Krashen (1982), and MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) strongly support the findings of the present study.

The study suggests that educational institutions should adopt supportive teaching methods to reduce speaking anxiety among learners. Teachers should encourage interactive classroom activities, confidence-building exercises, and constructive feedback mechanisms. Students should also be guided to use social media in productive ways that support learning rather than emotional comparison.

Overall, the study highlights that balanced and conscious use of social media can positively contribute to English language learning, while uncontrolled and emotionally driven usage may increase communication anxiety. Therefore, both digital literacy and emotional confidence are essential for effective communication in the modern educational environment.

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**(APPENDIX- A): QUESTIONNAIRE(18 ITEMS)**

Title of the Study:

**English Speaking Anxiety in the Age of Social Media: A Study among Undergraduate Learners**

**Instructions:**

This questionnaire is designed for academic research purposes only. All responses collected via Google Forms are confidential.

**Section I: Personal Information**

1. Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Roll Number: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Gender:

- Male
- Female

5. Course/Department: \_\_\_\_\_

**Section II: Questionnaire**

6. Do you regularly use social media?
  - Yes
  - No
7. Which social media platforms do you use? (Multiple responses)
  - Instagram
  - WhatsApp
  - YouTube
  - Facebook
  - X (Twitter)
  - Others
8. How much time do you spend daily on social media?
  - Less than 1 hour
  - 1–3 hours
  - 3–5 hours
  - More than 5 hours
9. Do you use social media for English learning?
  - Always
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely
  - Never
10. Social media improves English communication skills:
  - Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree

11. Do you feel anxious while speaking English?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

12. Reasons for English speaking anxiety (Multiple responses)

- Grammar mistakes
- Pronunciation problems
- Lack of confidence
- Fear of judgment
- Limited vocabulary

13. Online communication is easier than face-to-face speaking:

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

14. Social media encourages informal language use:

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

15. Social media affects formal English communication:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. Social comparison leads to frustration:

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

17. Social media reduces speaking anxiety:

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

18. Ways to reduce English speaking anxiety (Multiple responses)

- Regular speaking practice
- Supportive classroom environment
- Confidence building activities
- Use of social media for learning
- Reducing fear of mistakes

**(APPENDIX- B): RESPONSE SHEET (50 PARTICIPANTS)**

Q6

- Yes – 48 (96%)
- No – 2 (4%)

Q7 (Multiple Response)

- Instagram – 41 (82%)
- WhatsApp – 46 (92%)
- YouTube – 44 (88%)
- Facebook – 18 (36%)
- X (Twitter) – 9 (18%)
- Others – 6 (12%)

Q8

- Less than 1 hour – 3 (6%)
- 1–3 hours – 21 (42%)
- 3–5 hours – 19 (38%)
- More than 5 hours – 7 (14%)

Q9

- Always – 15 (30%)
- Sometimes – 24 (48%)
- Rarely – 8 (16%)
- Never – 3 (6%)

Q10

- Strongly Agree – 18 (36%)
- Agree – 23 (46%)
- Neutral – 5 (10%)
- Disagree – 3 (6%)
- Strongly Disagree – 1 (2%)

Q11

- Always – 14 (28%)
- Sometimes – 24 (48%)
- Rarely – 9 (18%)
- Never – 3 (6%)

Q12 (Multiple Response)

- Grammar mistakes – 28 (56%)
- Pronunciation problems – 24 (48%)
- Lack of confidence – 37 (74%)
- Fear of judgment – 31 (62%)
- Limited vocabulary – 19 (38%)

Q13

- Yes – 42 (84%)
- No – 3 (6%)
- Sometimes – 5 (10%)

Q14

- Yes – 36 (72%)
- No – 6 (12%)
- Not Sure – 8 (16%)

Q15

- Strongly Agree – 16 (32%)
- Agree – 20 (40%)
- Neutral – 8 (16%)
- Disagree – 4 (8%)
- Strongly Disagree – 2 (4%)

Q16

- Frequently – 17 (34%)
- Sometimes – 19 (38%)
- Rarely – 9 (18%)
- Never – 5 (10%)

Q17

- Yes – 43 (86%)
- No – 2 (4%)
- Maybe – 5 (10%)

Q18 (Multiple Response)

- Speaking practice – 38 (76%)
- Supportive classroom – 31 (62%)
- Confidence building – 29 (58%)
- Social media learning – 26 (52%)
- Fear reduction – 24 (48%)

**Note:** The above data is based on responses from 50 participants collected through Google Forms. Percentages are calculated accordingly, and multiple-response items may exceed 100%.