

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# FROM ANXIETY TO HARSH WORDS: A STUDY OF ACADEMIC ANXIETY AND VERBAL AGGRESSIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG STUDENTS

**Naurah Kinantan Abdillah<sup>1</sup>, Belva Nur Nabila<sup>2</sup>, Azeimul Kubro<sup>3</sup>, Zahra Agusticia<sup>4</sup>, Wiwik Juwarini Prihastiwi<sup>5\*</sup>**

[wiwikjuwariniprihastiwi@um-surabaya.ac.id](mailto:wiwikjuwariniprihastiwi@um-surabaya.ac.id)<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>[12345]</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the relationship between academic anxiety and verbal aggression on social media among university students. The method used was a quantitative approach with a correlational design. There were 100 randomly selected students as respondents. The instruments used in this study were two psychological scales, namely the academic anxiety scale and the verbal aggression scale on social media, each consisting of 10 items using a 4-point Likert scale. The results of Pearson's correlation analysis showed a coefficient value of  $r = 0.324$  with a significance of  $p = 0.001$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), which means that there is a positive and significant relationship between academic anxiety and verbal aggression on social media. These findings indicate that the higher the level of academic anxiety, the greater the tendency for students to exhibit verbally aggressive behavior on social media. The percentage of verbal aggression was very low at 9%, low at 18%, moderate at 48%, high at 16%, and very high at 9%.

**Keywords:** academic anxiety, verbal aggression, social media, students, correlation

## INTRODUCTION

Advances in digital technology have driven major changes in communication and social interaction patterns, including among students. Social media has now become the main space for expression, but it is also often a place for venting negative emotions. One form of maladaptive behavior that has emerged in this context is verbal aggression, which is the tendency of individuals to make hurtful, demeaning, or verbally abusive comments in online spaces. Buss & Perry (1992) define verbal aggression as “the tendency to express negative feelings toward others through words rather than actions.” Another opinion is expressed by Langi and Wakas (2020) that verbal aggression is an act that leads to hate speech in the form of words by an individual towards another person. More specifically, online verbal aggression is a means used to attack others using information and communication technology such as text messages

and social networks (Wright & Li, 2010). In the context of social media, this can take the form of hate speech, sarcasm, mockery, or debates using harsh language.

Based on research conducted by Satrio (in Istiqomah, 2017), social media contributes 32.56% to the formation of aggression. The results of research conducted by Wahyudi et al. (2022) found that 54.4% of 103 respondents had left negative comments on social media. Social media is the largest contributor to verbal aggression, with a percentage of 71% (Profesi, 2021). In a study conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2019, at least 49% of netizens were victims of verbal aggression.

According to Lim, et al. and Obaid, et al. in (Tagareva, 2025), problematic internet use is often accompanied by other psychological problems, such as anxiety, depression, and impulsivity. This

phenomenon of anxiety is becoming increasingly relevant amid the academic pressures experienced by students, especially during transitional phases of college, such as final exams, heavy coursework, and pressure to achieve academic success. This anxiety arises as a response to perceived excessive academic demands and has an impact on physiological, cognitive, and behavioral conditions. One potential consequence is the venting of negative emotions through verbally aggressive behavior in the virtual world (Hembree, 1988).

The condition can be explained based on the General Aggression Model (Anderson and Bushman, 2018), which explains that affective factors such as anger and frustration, as well as pressure, are factors that influence aggressive behavior. Wehde (2020) argues that in response to stress, individuals may exhibit internalizing behaviors (depression, anxiety, withdrawal) or externalizing behaviors (aggression, rule-breaking, intrusion) (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2003). However, internalizing and externalizing problems can be comorbid (in Wehde, 2020). Specifically, anxiety (internalizing disorder) and aggression (externalizing) are often found to be interrelated.

Previous research has shown that anxiety experiences manifest themselves in four domains (Koksal & Power, 1990). Cognition (negative thoughts or worries), physiological arousal, negative emotions, and behavioral responses (e.g., avoidance) are important elements of anxiety experiences according to this model. The “fight or flight” response (Cannon, 1929), or “fight, flight, or freeze” (Brancha et al., 2004) is often discussed to explain how physiological arousal during stressful situations can lead to behavioral outcomes (Kunimatsu & Marsee, 2012; Taylor et al., 2000). This model can help explain why individuals often experience a combination of internalizing symptoms (e.g., anxiety) and externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression) (Kunimatsu & Marsee, 2012), given that one potential behavioral response in anxiety-provoking moments is “fight.”

Another theory that explains the relationship of anxiety with aggression is the theory of information processing (cognitive theory). There are several

social cognitive biases that can influence the relationship between anxiety and aggression. First is social threat bias, which is a form of attentional bias that involves an individual's increased attention to the surrounding threat stimulus (Helzer et al., 2009). Next is aversive attribution bias: a cognitive bias involving the interpretation of intent in ambiguous situations, which can influence one's choice of aggressive response (Crick & Dodge; 1994). Social information processing theory has been used to better understand these cognitive mechanisms and how they underlie experiences of anxiety and aggression (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000).

On the other hand, the Online Disinhibition Effect Theory proposed by Suler (2004) explains that social media provides a space for individuals to express their aggressive side, which is usually restrained in direct interactions. This is because when individuals enter cyberspace, they experience anonymity, feel that there are no immediate consequences for their actions, and psychological distance allows individuals to express their frustration or anger more freely verbally. In this context, emotional pressures such as academic anxiety can trigger aggressive behavior in the form of sarcastic remarks, insults, and even online abuse (Barlett, Gentile, & Anderson, 2009). This is because academic anxiety contributes to various forms of psychological distress that affect student behavior (von der Embse, Barterian, & Segool, 2018).

Based on the above description, the research question is whether there is a relationship between academic anxiety and verbal aggression on social media among students. Based on the theoretical framework and previous findings, the purpose of this study is to determine and analyze the relationship between academic anxiety and verbal aggression on social media among students, as well as to contribute theoretically to the development of literature on the digital behavior of adolescents and young adults in higher education.

## METHOD

### *Research Design*

This study is a quantitative study with an associative approach. According to Azwar (2017), the quantitative method is a research approach based on the philosophy of positivism, which is used to study a specific population or sample, with data collection using research instruments and quantitative or statistical data analysis, with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses and determining the relationship between two variables, namely academic anxiety as the independent variable (X) and verbal aggression on social media as the dependent variable (Y). Based on its design, this research is classified as non-experimental because the researcher did not give special treatment to the participantss, but only measured and observed the conditions that already existed naturally.

#### *Measurement*

Data was collected using a questionnaire with a Likert scale. The research instrument was a questionnaire and was administered via Google Forms.

Tabel 1. Blueprint for Academic Anxiety Variables

| Dimension                 | Indicator   | Item No.    | Number Of Item | Description |
|---------------------------|---|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| Cognitive Worry           | Concerns about academic results and performance           | 1, 6, 8     | 3              | Favorable   |
| Emotionality              | Emotional or physiological reactions to academic pressure | 3, 5, 9     | 3              | Favorable   |
| Self-Confidence (inverse) | Self-confidence in academic situations                    | 2, 4, 7, 10 | 4              | Unfavorable |

2. Verbal aggression was measured using the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) by Buss and Perry (1992), with dimensions of Verbal Hostility, Verbal Retaliation, and Verbal Control (inverse), consisting of 10

items. Several items were adjusted contextually to reflect verbal aggression in social media activities, such as comments, posts, and private messages.

Tabel 2. Blueprint for Verbal Aggression

| Dimension        | Indikator  | Item No.   | Number Of Item | Description |
|------------------|--|------------|----------------|-------------|
| Verbal Hostility | Verbally attacking others through comments or statuses | 1, 3, 4, 9 | 4              | Favorable   |

#### *Research Participants*

The participantss of this study were students of the Faculty of Psychology, Muhammadiyah University Surabaya. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, a non-probability technique in which participantss are selected deliberately based on certain criteria predetermined by the researcher. These criteria include: active students of the Faculty of Psychology, Muhammadiyah University Surabaya, in semesters 2–8, who have active social media accounts and are willing to participate by voluntarily filling out a questionnaire

1. Academic anxiety was measured using Zeidner's Academic Anxiety Scale (1998), which includes dimensions of worry, emotionality, and self-confidence, consisting of 10 items.

|                          |   |             |   |             |
|--------------------------|---|-------------|---|-------------|
| Verbal Retaliation       | Responding to comments or provocations with aggressive language | 6, 7        | 2 | Favorable   |
| Verbal Control (inverse) | Controlling oneself to refrain from verbal attacks              | 2, 5, 8, 10 | 4 | Unfavorable |

### *Validity and Reliability Test*

Before the instrument is used, a validity and reliability analysis is conducted to ensure that each item measures the variable to be measured and is consistent in its measurement.

#### a. Validity Test

Items with a correlation coefficient ( $r_{xt}$ ) below 0.30 are considered to have low discriminatory power and should be eliminated from the scale. Conversely, items with a correlation coefficient of 0.30 or higher are considered valid and can be retained (Azwar, 2017).

Tabel 3. Measurement Tool Validity Test

| No | Measuring Instrument | Valid item | Failed Item | Correlation Coefficient Range |
|----|----------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 1  | Academic Anxiety     | 10         | 0           | 0.175 - 0.348                 |
| 2  | Verbal Aggression    | 10         | 0           | 0.514 - 0.805                 |

#### b. Reliability Test

The reliability of the scale measurement function is evaluated through two types of statistics, namely the reliability coefficient ( $r_{xx}$ ) and the standard error in

measurement (SE). Theoretically, the reliability coefficient  $r_{xx}$  ranges from 0 to 1.00. Even though the higher the reliability coefficient is, approaching 1.00, the more reliable the measurement is (Azwar, 2017).

Tabel 4. Reliability Test of Academic Anxiety and Verbal Aggressiveness Variables

| No | Measuring Instrument | Number Of Item | Cronbach's Alpha |
|----|----------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1  | Academic Anxiety     | 10             | .763             |
| 2  | Verbal Aggression    | 10             | .847             |

Based on the table above, the results obtained for the Cronbach's Alpha value of both measurement instruments in this study are  $> 0.60$ , so it can be concluded that both measurement instruments are reliable.

## RESULT

### *Descriptive Analysis*

Tabel 5. Descriptive Analysis

| Variabel    | N   | Mean  | SD    | Min | Max |
|-------------|-----|-------|-------|-----|-----|
| Anxiety     | 100 | 25.71 | 4.120 | 17  | 40  |
| Aggressions | 100 | 20.58 | 5.301 | 10  | 34  |

SD = standard deviation. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 29.

### *Data Analysis Results using Product Moment*

Tabel 6. Correlation Test Results

| Variabel           | 1 | 2      | M     | SD   |
|--------------------|---|--------|-------|------|
| <b>Anxiety</b>     | - | .324** | 25.71 | 4.12 |
| <b>Aggressions</b> |   |        | 20.58 | 5.30 |

N = 100. The Pearson Product-Moment correlation showed a significant positive relationship between academic anxiety and verbal aggression,  $r(100) = .324, p = .001$ .

SD = standard deviation. \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 29.

Based on the above table, it is known that the value of the correlation coefficient  $r_{xy} = 0.324$  with a significance level of  $p < 0.01$ , it can be concluded that academic anxiety is significantly positively correlated with verbal aggressiveness, meaning that the higher the academic anxiety, the higher the verbal aggressiveness of social media.

#### *Differences in male and female aggressiveness*

Tabel. 7 Independent Sample T Test

| Gender        | N  | Mean  | SD   |
|---------------|----|-------|------|
| <b>Male</b>   | 29 | 20.79 | 5.76 |
| <b>Female</b> | 72 | 20.50 | 5.15 |

**Note.** SD = standard deviation; SE Mean = standard error of the mean.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 29 (2025). Based on the output table above in the section "Equal variances assumed" known value of significance (Sig.) by 0.384 ( $p > 0.05$ ), then  $H_0$  was

accepted and  $H_a$  was rejected which means that there was no significant difference between male and female Verbal aggressiveness

#### *Categories of Aggressions from Highest to Lowest*

Tabel. 8 Categorization Of High-Low Verbal Aggressiveness

| Category         | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) | Cumulative (%) |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Very Low</b>  | 9             | 9.0            | 9.0            |
| <b>Low</b>       | 18            | 18.0           | 27.0           |
| <b>Medium</b>    | 48            | 48.0           | 75.0           |
| <b>High</b>      | 16            | 16.0           | 91.0           |
| <b>Very High</b> | 9             | 9.0            | 100.0          |
| <b>Total</b>     | 100           | 100.0          | -              |

**Note.** Categorization of verbal aggressiveness was based on total scores on the verbal aggression scale. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 29 (2025).

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study explain individuals with academic anxiety tend to experience mental stress, feelings of fear of failure, or stress ahead of a task or exam. In conditions of such pressure, social media often becomes a socially safe emotional outlet space. This phenomenon is known as the online disinhibition effect, which is a person's

tendency to be more expressive, even aggressive, when interacting in cyberspace due to the lack of supervision and the absence of direct consequences (Suler, 2004). In a state of anxiety, the ability to regulate emotions decreases (Gross, 1998), so that individuals more easily show negative emotional responses, including in the form of verbal aggression.

This condition can be understood through the framework of the General Aggression Model proposed by Anderson and Bushman (2018), which highlights that affective factors such as anger, frustration and psychological distress have an important contribution to the appearance of aggressive behavior. In line with that, Wehde (2020) explains that individuals facing stress can exhibit two main forms of psychological reactions, which are internalized behaviors (such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal) or externalized (such as aggression, rule-breaking, and intrusive behavior), as also described by Achenbach and Rescorla (2003). These two types of responses are not absolutely separate, since internalization and externalization problems often appear simultaneously or comorbid (Wehde, 2020).

More specifically, anxiety as a form of internalizing disorder and aggression as a manifestation of externalization are often interconnected. Koksal and Power (1990) state that the experience of anxiety can be seen through four main aspects: the cognitive component (negative thoughts and worries), physiological activation, negative emotions, as well as behavioral responses such as avoidance. Based on the classic "fight or flight" stress response model proposed by Cannon (1929) and developed into "fight, flight, or freeze" by Brancha et al. (2004), increased physiological arousal in stressful situations can trigger diverse behavioral reactions. In this context, high anxiety can lead to a "fight" reaction in response to threats or pressure, so aggressive behavior can appear along with anxiety symptoms (Kunimatsu & Marsee, 2012; Taylor et al., 2000). This Model explains that the link between internalizing and externalizing disorders arises because they are both rooted in the same physiological and emotional mechanisms in the face of stress.

The results of this study are supported by several previous studies. Research by Wahyudi, Pratama, and Mulyani (2023) found that feelings of loneliness are significantly associated with aggressive behavior on social media. In addition, studies by Nugrahani and Lestari (2024) also show that low self-control contributes to the emergence of aggressive verbal behavior online. Although the variable focus was different, all three showed a

common thread that emotional distress—whether due to loneliness, anxiety, or low self-control—can trigger verbal aggressiveness on social media.

Compared to the study by Dewi and Savira (2022), which found a very strong correlation between emotional intelligence and social media aggression in high school students ( $r = 0.859$ ), the results of this study did show a lower correlation. This difference may be due to the difference in age and level of emotional maturity of the respondents. College students tend to have more complex social experiences and self-regulation abilities, so the intensity of verbal aggressiveness may be better controlled despite high academic anxiety.

Overall, these findings support the research hypothesis that there is a link between academic anxiety and verbal aggressiveness on social media. Although the relationship is not very strong, but significant and meaningful psychologically. This study also contributes to the literature on the influence of emotional conditions on communication behavior in the digital realm, especially among students..

## CONCLUSION

Based on data analysis, it was found that academic anxiety has a positive and significant correlation with the tendency of verbal aggressiveness on social media. This means that the higher the level of academic anxiety that students experience, the more likely they are to express negative emotions in the form of verbal aggression in the digital space. These findings indicate that poorly managed emotions, particularly anxiety in academic contexts, have the potential to influence students' online verbal aggression. This symptom can be understood through psychological mechanisms such as downregulation of emotions and the effect of online disinhibition, which allows the expression of emotions to occur more freely without direct social control.

As a continuation of this research, it is important to develop interventions that encourage students to manage anxiety in a healthy way and strengthen

ethical literacy in communicating on social media. Further research may explore the role of mediating variables such as self-control, empathy, or social support to understand more deeply the relationship pathways between psychological conditions and online behavior.

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