

Students' Perceptions of Social Media Confidence Versus Classroom Social Anxiety

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Abstract

The rise of social media has transformed communication and self-expression, but it has also created a disparity between online and offline personas, particularly among college students. This study investigates the phenomenon of social media confidence versus classroom social anxiety at University of Nias, focusing on second- and fourth-semester students in the English education department. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with five students who actively use social media but interact less in the campus environment. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that students experience higher confidence and satisfaction on social media due to the lack of direct pressure and anonymity, which contrasts with their anxiety in traditional classroom settings. The study highlights the importance of a supportive and inclusive classroom environment to reduce social anxiety and enhance student engagement. Universities should provide resources such as psychological counseling, social skills training, and support groups to help students manage social anxiety. Integrating social media into the learning process and encouraging a balance between online and offline interactions can foster student confidence in both contexts. Effective anxiety management training is also essential for helping students navigate social dynamics in classrooms and on social media. These findings can inform interventions and strategies to support students in developing a healthy sense of self-presentation and authentic connections across different social spheres.

Keywords: Anxiety Management; Inclusive Classroom Environment; Psychological Counseling; Social Dynamics.

1. Introduction

The rise of social media has completely transformed how we express ourselves, communicate, and exchange information. According to (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019), the six fundamental components of social media as a communication platform are identification, conversation, sharing, presence, relationship, and reputation. Social media has several benefits, including staying in touch with loved ones, developing social networks, and staying up to speed on current events (Boyd & Ellison, 2019). However, it has also been associated with various potential drawbacks, including the development of disparate online and offline personalities, a phenomenon particularly noticeable among students.

This issue, known as the "online-offline persona gap," is especially prominent among college students, who regularly negotiate the social dynamics of both the virtual world of social media and the physical classroom (Suler, 2022). Online disinhibition theory suggests that individuals feel less restrained and more expressive when conversing online compared to face-to-face interactions. In this context, understanding how students navigate these different environments can shed light on the challenges they face, particularly regarding self-presentation and social anxiety. Research by (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012) shows that social media use can have a considerable impact on students' emotional and psychological well-being, emphasizing the importance of further investigation into this gap.

By investigating how students perceive their social interactions both online and offline, this study hopes to provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to social anxiety and confidence issues. (Telaumbanua, 2023) explains that perception is the subjective experience individuals develop based on their observations and interpretations of reality. Understanding how these perceptions shape behavior can help educators develop strategies to bridge the online-offline persona gap and support students' well-being. Additionally, (Hogan's, 2020) research shows that increasing students' self-awareness of their online and offline actions may lessen the negative impacts of this gap.



Despite the existing research on social media's impact on communication and self-expression, there is still a limited understanding of how students experience the online-offline persona gap and how this gap affects their academic and social life. Most research have focused on either online behavior or offline contact, with few exploring the connection between the two (Ellison et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a need to examine how social media influences students' self-confidence in traditional settings, particularly in classrooms, and how this phenomenon affects their social development.

This research aims to fill the gap by examining the experiences of college students who demonstrate a noticeable difference in their social participation and confidence between social media and the classroom. By understanding the underlying causes of this persona gap, the study can provide advice for reducing social anxiety and increasing students' confidence in both online and offline settings (Valkenburg et al., 2021). Strategies could include integrating social media into classroom activities to foster more consistent self-presentation across both spaces.

2. Method

This study uses a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the subjective meanings that individuals describe to their experiences. According to (Ospina, S. 2020) explores the use of narrative methods in qualitative research. She explains how people's stories and narratives may provide deep insights into their lives and perspectives. The study follows descriptive and narrative qualitative methodology, focusing on thoughts, perceptions, views, or beliefs that cannot be quantified but are critical for understanding the social or human issue at hand.

The research was conducted at the English Education Program of the University of Nias, with data collection carried out over a designated period that was flexible to accommodate participants' schedules. The primary variables in this study are the differences in self-confidence on social media versus social anxiety in the classroom. The population consists of students from this program who exhibit a noticeable distinction between their online social media presence and their classroom behaviour. A purposive sampling method was used, involving five students—four female and one male—that were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research focus.

Data were collected through structured interviews, (Clough and Nutbrown, 2021) discuss the use of structured interviews as a research method for gathering consistent and systematic information. They underline the importance of planned interviews in educational and social settings because they reduce variability in question responses and allow for better data processing. The authors also note that, while structured interviews may limit flexibility, they provide clarity and order in data collection, which involve asking a set of predetermined questions to gather information on the topic. The interviews included seven questions designed to explore participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the disparity between social media confidence and classroom social anxiety. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and meanings in the participants' narratives. This approach sheds light on the complex interactions between social anxiety, self-presentation, and the different settings of social media and classrooms.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, with all participants providing written consent before participating in the interviews. The confidentiality of the collected data was maintained, and the data were used solely for research purposes. The study aims to provide insights into the causes, contributing factors, and potential outcomes of the online-offline persona gap. The findings are expected to inform interventions and strategies to support students in navigating social dynamics both in classroom and online environments, fostering authentic connections, and developing a healthy sense of self-presentation across various social spheres.

3. Findings and Discussion

This research was conducted at University of Nias, focusing on second- and fourth-semester students in the English education department. The sample was randomly selected and involved five students who met the research criteria, namely being active on social media and showing a tendency to interact less in the campus environment.

Table 1. Sample of respondents

Gender of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Female	4
Male	1
Total	5

Based on the research findings of the students' interview, researchers found out the students' perspective of social media confidence versus classroom social anxiety at University of Nias as follow:

Table 2. First question and response from the respondents

Question	Response
For the first question, can you describe your overall experience in a traditional classroom environment?	Based on the question about describe your overall experience in a traditional classroom environment, most respondents answered that what their overall activities, some of it not progressing well when feel pressured or

overly anxious when there is a Q&A session, nervous when answering, especially when the answer is wrong, not interested in the learning process because when using English and not good at the materials. However, others also have positive experiences such as fun in term of friendship, can collaborate and quite pleasant because often meet good friends.

These varied experiences underscore the significance of a supportive and engaging classroom environment. According to (Mathur, 2022), the classroom setting plays a critical role in student engagement and continuity. Interactions within this environment greatly influence students' experiences, shaping their perceptions and overall learning journey. Therefore, it is crucial to create a balanced and inclusive classroom atmosphere that caters to diverse student needs and fosters positive learning experiences for all. Encouraging supportive teacher-student and peer relationships can help build a positive social environment (Nwokedi, 2023).

To cultivate such an environment, educators must focus on building strong teacher-student relationships. This involves creating open lines of communication, where students feel comfortable asking questions without fear of judgment. Additionally, fostering peer relationships can lead to collaborative learning experiences, where students can support one another, share knowledge, and build confidence. The experiences of students in traditional classroom settings are multifaceted and deeply influenced by the environment created by educators. By fostering supportive relationships and implementing inclusive practices, teachers can enhance student engagement and create a positive learning atmosphere.

Table 3. Second question and response from the respondents

Question	Response
Second question, what makes you feel anxious in social situations in college? Can you share a specific experience that made you feel that way?	According to some respondents lack of confidence during presentations and group work often happens in lecture classes. It happened because lack of preparation, fear of other people's judgments and negative evaluations, feel nervous when being spoken to by lecturers, and lack of confidence in the knowledge and skills. When it turns out to interact with group members, but they are not good at finding material to talk about, it makes the situation awkward.

Based on the interview responses, several key factors contributing to social anxiety among college students were identified. Respondents reported that a lack of preparation for presentations and group work, fear of judgment, and nervousness when interacting with lecturers significantly impact their confidence levels. This aligns with (Mehta, 2016), who found a significant negative correlation between social anxiety disorder and the school environment in adolescents. The complexity and dynamics of the academic environment can exacerbate students' social anxiety, affecting their overall performance and well-being. The lack of preparation and fear of negative evaluations were frequently mentioned as sources of anxiety. For instance, students who felt unprepared for presentations reported a heightened sense of vulnerability and fear of public speaking, which led to increased anxiety. This experience is consistent with (Suryaningrum, 2021), who concluded that many college students experience social anxiety, reflecting broader mental health concerns within this demographic. This suggests a need for targeted interventions to address these specific anxieties, such as workshops or coaching sessions on public speaking and presentation skills.

Table 4. Third question and response from the respondents

Question	Response
Third question, do you participate in activities on social media, such as posting photos, videos, or dancing? If yes, can you describe your experiences?	Based on the question about respondent's participation experiences on social media, all respondents participated in this, with various experiences. All of them feel confident, happy, and satisfied. They can control the content they share and like, so they can interact with people without direct pressure and also receive positive responses from netizens. They also feel challenged by the anxiety of others' judgements, so the content uploaded must remain positive, but overall responses are satisfactory. They also value privacy so that their information is stored and can be viewed anytime by anyone.

Based on the responses from all the respondents about students' activities on social media, this also supported by (Onat, 2021), young adults who are university students prefer to fulfill their needs through social media, such as receiving information, communicating, socializing, and engaging in leisure activities. However, not all experiences are positive. Some respondents reported facing cyberbullying and social pressure, which can diminish their self-confidence.

Gender differences are also evident in social media participation and experiences. Research by (Jones and Fox, 2019) shows that women are more likely to experience social pressure on social media compared to men, which can affect their self-confidence levels. The most commonly used social media platforms among respondents are Instagram and TikTok, where they find it easier to share content and receive positive feedback. However, experiences on other platforms such as Facebook tend to be more varied.

In conclusion, while social media provides numerous benefits in terms of personal expression and interaction, it also presents challenges that can impact mental health and self-confidence. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to mitigate negative effects and enhance positive experiences for users.

Table 5. Forth question and response from the respondents

Question	Response
Fourth question, what aspects of social media make you feel more confident than being in the classroom?	According to respondents, feeling trusted to talk with friends is one of the aspects of social media that makes them feel more confident than being in the classroom. They can communicate without having to meet face-to-face because there are no rules that make them feel burdened, unlike in lecture situations where they have to do assignments, dress neatly, and especially meet some lecturers who put a little pressure on them. Although as students they have to learn discipline, it all feels like being regulated. Unlike social media, which has no rules, even though using social media we consider words more carefully, as well as the anonymity and flexibility of time.

Based on the interviews, students reported feeling more confident on social media compared to in the classroom. Aspects contributing to this confidence include the ability to communicate without face-to-face interaction and the lack of formal rules present in academic settings. Social media offers flexibility and anonymity, which are not found in the more structured and often pressuring classroom environment. Recent study backs up these conclusions. (Zhao and Xu, 2021) discovered that using social media can boost self-confidence and self-esteem, owing to the fact that online interactions are often more regulated and less direct than face-to-face interactions in academic settings. Their research found that the freedom given by social media allows people to express themselves without direct coercion, which mirrors the experiences expressed by students in interviews. (Johnson and Lee, 2023) also found that digital interactions had a major influence on self-perception. In their book, they discuss how social media may influence people's self-perceptions, providing a more optimistic viewpoint than academic settings where judgments can be more direct and severe. These findings are consistent with students' comments of feeling more secure while communicating on social media vs in-class circumstances, when they feel restricted and scrutinized.

Table 6. Fifth question and response from the respondents

Question	Response
Fifth question, how do your anxiety levels compare when interacting online and in person? Please explain.	Based on the question about how anxiety levels compare when interacting online versus in person, all respondents stated that their anxiety is higher in social environments than in online interactions. This is because, in a classroom setting, they often feel inadequate when asked to explain or answer questions from lecturers, fearing they are not knowledgeable enough about the subjects. Additionally, they worry about being judged by others, whether it is for their responses, speech, appearance, or other factors. In contrast, during social media interactions, they do not need to explain complicated topics they are unfamiliar with. They can be relax, as people only see the curated content they choose to post, rather than their complete reality.

Based on the interviews, students reported experiencing higher levels of anxiety in face-to-face interactions compared to online interactions. They often feel inadequate when asked to explain or answer questions in class,

fearing judgment regarding their knowledge, responses, speech, appearance, or other factors. Conversely, in online interactions, students feel more relaxed as they can curate the content they share and avoid complex topics they are unfamiliar with.

Recent study backs up these findings. Davis and (Cooper, 2021) investigated the psychological impact of social media on anxiety and self-esteem. Their findings show that online interactions can reduce immediate anxiety levels because people have greater control over the information they share and are less sensitive to real-time judgments. This is consistent with interviewees' perceptions of feeling less uncomfortable during online interactions than in in-person ones. (Williams and Nelson, 2022) investigated the variations in social anxiety between online and offline contacts. Their research revealed that social anxiety is typically reduced in online contexts, where people may avoid direct scrutiny and have greater control over their responses. This validates the idea that students are more confident and less afraid to communicate online since they have anonymity and control over their self-presentation.

(Patel and Martinez, 2023) provide a fresh perspective on the impact of social media on anxiety and in-person interactions. Their findings highlight that, while social media provides a controlled environment that might help ease acute anxiety, it is also vital to address underlying anxiety issues that persist across different types of interactions. This viewpoint is relevant to the students' reports, as they feel less pressure online but still have worry about their general self-perception and performance.

Table 7. Sixth question and response from the respondents

Question	Response
Sixth question, what strategies do you use to overcome social anxiety in class, and when using your social media?	Answer: according to the respondents, the strategies they use to overcome social anxiety in class include thorough preparation by practicing in front of a mirror, controlling their breath while interacting in class, and reducing interactions with anyone before class to maintain focus. When it comes to social media, they overcome social anxiety by limiting their usage time, reducing the content they engage with, and carefully managing their interactions to ensure they remain positive and supportive.

Based on the interviews, students reported using various strategies to overcome social anxiety in class, such as practicing in front of a mirror, controlling their breath during interactions, and reducing interactions with others before class to maintain focus. When it comes to social media, they manage social anxiety by limiting their usage time, reducing engagement with certain content, and carefully managing their interactions to ensure they remain positive and supportive.

Recent studies provide valuable insights into these strategies. (Thompson and Baker, 2023) provide practical guidelines for reducing social anxiety in educational settings. They advocate for thorough preparation and mindfulness techniques, such as breath control, to help students manage anxiety in class. These strategies are consistent with the methods described by the students in the interviews. (Harris and Clarke, 2023) discuss managing anxiety and stress related to social media use. They highlight the importance of digital well-being practices, including setting time limits on social media use and being mindful of the content consumed. These practices are echoed in the students' strategies for reducing social anxiety online.

Table 8. Seventh question and response from the respondents

Question	Response
Seventh question, In your view, what can University of Nias do to help English Language Education students overcome social anxiety in learning?	Based on the question about the support that the university can provide, it is important to offer social skills training, provide psychological counselling, and facilitate discussion and support groups. Additionally, implementing inclusive teaching practices, offering guidance and motivation, and organizing events where students can express themselves would be beneficial.

Based on the interviews, students suggested that the University of Nias could support English Language Education students in overcoming social anxiety by offering social skills training, providing psychological counselling, and facilitating discussion and support groups. Additionally, implementing inclusive teaching practices, offering guidance and motivation, and organizing events where students can express themselves would be beneficial.

(Thompson and Brown, 2022) underline the value of inclusive teaching strategies in reducing social anxiety. Their findings indicate that creating an inclusive classroom environment in which all students feel valued and supported can significantly reduce anxiety. This adds weight to the notion that the University of Nias should use more inclusive teaching methods to help students feel more at ease and engaged. (Anderson and White, 2023) investigate how extracurricular activities might increase student involvement while lowering anxiety. They discovered that participation in extracurricular activities helps kids form social relationships and generate a feeling of belonging, which might help reduce anxiety. Organizing activities where students may express themselves, as proposed by the students, is a realistic strategy to minimizing social anxiety.

These insights suggest that the University of Nias could implement several strategies to support students with social anxiety. Offering social skills training, psychological counseling, and support groups can provide students with the tools they need to manage their anxiety effectively. Additionally, adopting inclusive teaching practices and organizing extracurricular events can create a more supportive and engaging environment for students.

4. Conclusion

The research on students' perceptions of social media confidence versus classroom social anxiety at the University of Nias reveals distinct differences in how these environments impact student confidence and anxiety. Through in-depth interviews with second- and fourth-semester English education students, it was found that students generally feel more confident and satisfied when interacting on social media. The absence of direct pressure and the anonymity provided by social media allow students to control the content they share and engage with others without the immediate fear of judgment. In contrast, traditional classroom settings often trigger higher levels of anxiety among students due to factors such as lack of preparation, fear of judgment, and nervousness during interactions with lecturers. The structured nature of classroom environments and the direct scrutiny faced during presentations and group work exacerbate these feelings. To manage their anxiety, students employ various strategies, including thorough preparation, practicing in front of a mirror, and using breath control techniques for classroom interactions. On social media, they limit usage time, carefully select content, and ensure their interactions remain positive. The study suggests that the University of Nias could support students by offering social skills training, psychological counselling, and support groups. Additionally, implementing inclusive teaching practices and organizing events where students can express themselves would create a more supportive and engaging learning environment. In conclusion, the disparity between social media confidence and classroom social anxiety among students at the University of Nias highlights the need for targeted interventions to support student well-being. University can help students develop confidence in both online and offline interactions by providing resources such as social skills training, psychological counselling, and support groups can further aid students in managing their anxiety and enhancing their overall educational experience. These efforts are crucial for fostering a healthy sense of self-presentation and authentic connections across different social spheres.

It is important to acknowledge the limitation of the interviews conducted, including small sample size and potential reporting biases. Further research with a larger and more diverse sample is needed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies students use to manage social anxiety in different contexts.

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