# THE RHETORIC OF ANXIETY :A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS TO "THE ANXIOUS GENERATION" BY JONATHAN HAIDT

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## Abstract
*The concept of anxiety may be characterised as feeling of tension, sense of uncertainty and emotional situation of inner turmoil that perhaps cause of fear, restlessness, worried thought and rapid heartbeat of any creature. Thus this concept introduced by Jonathan Haidt's book The Anxious Generation that examined rise in mental health issues among the generations born after 1995.The vast rewiring of infancy that fundamentally changed experience of young generation lead to an epidemic rise of anxiety, depression and other mental health problem. The purpose of this research is to examined the rhetorical strategies, discursive devices and linguistic features in the way that how children interact with technology. It explored how language is use to assemble a narrative of anxiety and technological deterninism. This research highlight how the play-based child becoming phone-based child due to immense use of modern technologies, Thus the finding of this research highlight Haidt's contribution to a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping public perception of mental health, technology and have implications for promoting healthy technology use and justifying its negative effects.*

**Key words** :Anxiety, Critical Discourse Analysis, Rhetorical Strategies, Mental Health, Technology, Discursive Devices, Childhood, Adolescence ,

## Introduction

Jonathan Haidt introduced interesting, disquieting, and misleading manuscript *An Anxious Generation:How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness.*.its central idea pay attention on COVID -19 disruption, academic pressure and other cultural stressors that make difficult the picture of Z generation.His work argued the rise of mental illness due to immense use of screen time, social network, carelessness or domineering parenting that express to rewiring of childhood.The idea of this phrase referred the momentous changes and alteration that how children grow, learn and interact with society. Haidt looked at the critical analysis of play-based childhood, phone based childhood and multiple factors such as sleep disruption, attention disintegration and unfavorable impact of social network. Near the beginning of 2010, a significant shift in adolescent mental health with a remarkable increase in anxiety and depression rates,particularly among generation Z occured. The introduction of smartphones distorted social dynamics due to scrappy interaction and increased use of social media. By explaining the term anxiety and depression that are usually lined to alleged fears and involves feeling of hopelessness leading to social extrication and a worsening cycle of mental health issue. Jonathan Haidt illustrate four fundamental harms in his work that are social dispossession, nap deprivation, attention destruction and obsessin..He highlight how the alteration from physical play to smartphone interaction may undermine critical social skills for healthy childhood development. The swing from play based to phone based interaction intimidate emotional and cultural development process.

Although adolescence is a critical period for brain development necessitating rich experience for healthy maturation.The combination of safetyism and ubiquites smartphone use significantly restricts the formative experience of young people need.With screen time averaging 40-50 hours weekly, fundamental activities and face to face interaction have decreased, that signifying the opportunity cost of a phone-oriented childhood. Jonathan Haidt imitate the impact of technology and emphasiz a rejection in spiritual well-being

due to the phone-based life. He discover how this shift influences emotions, social interaction and overall spiritual landscape.The title depicts rhetorical strategies, discourse analysis, narrative construction, argumentation strategies and critical anaylsis of Haidt text.

**Rhetoric of Anxiety :Main idea**

**Rhetorical Strategies:** it is an ability of convincing speaking or writing and highlight an effectual use of language, arguments to inform, inspire or persuade an audience.

**Discourse Analysis** : It is a study of spoken or written language in use, focusing on how language is use to convey meaning within social contexts. It involve patterns of language use, power, dynamics and cultural norms and how these factors influence communication and interpretation in various contexts.

**Argumentation strategies:** Argue relate to collection of statements intended to support or inter a claim while argumentation strategies are techniques that use to present and build a persuasive case, evidence and rhetorical devices to convince a lisners to accept a particular point of view.

**Critical Analysis**: A discipline to thinking that is clear, reational, open-minded and informed by the evidence is called critical Analysis..

Thus these terms explor this research and findout that Haidt's use of linguistic features influence the reader's interpretation of the text and use of discursive strategies employ to persuade readers of the need for change in the way that how children interact with technology while use of rhetorical devices also contribute to the construction of anxiety in "The Anxious Generation".

**Research Objectives**

As it has been mentioned that this study is about critical discourse analysis of Jonathan Haidt's work as An Anxious Generation in term of anxiety and mental health due to social network and excessive screen time therefore targeted objectives of this study are:

- To explore the increasing supremacy of anxiety among childrens and adult people in term of screentime.
- To examine how language and discourse of Jonathan Haidt's work construct our understanding of anxiety.

**Research Questions**

The concentrated problem in this study is: critical discourse analysis of Jonathan Haidt's book as An Anxious Generation therefore it has following questions.

- How social network and digital technologies contribute to anxiety among Z generation?
- How does Haidt's work construct rhetorical strategies, discursive devices through language?

**Rational of the study**

This study trace out discourse analysis of book *An Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt. It explores integration of social network and rise of mental health issues to childrens an adults peoples. The introduction of phone based children lead to dispression, emotional dysregulation, cognitive disintegration and negative aspects of lives. By analysis the impact of social network on childrens and adults cognitive aspects this study provides a balanced relation to real world and screen time interaction. The critical discourse analysis of Jonathan Haidt's work examine the language and rhetorical strategies usage to mental health issues .

**Background of the study**

It is alarming situation to understand that the reason of mental health issues are use of modern technologies and social network.Thus this alarming surge tracing mental health issues among generation z and terms the great rewiring of childhood. This transformation, initiation around 2010, coincided with the rise of smartphones and social network, fundamentally varying children's development. By understanding this situation Allene (2024) concluded that unconfirmed play, increased screen time and the pervasive influence of digital platforms have disrupted natural social learning and emotional resilience. Depiction of interdisciplinary research, the book *An Anxious Generation* presents a compelling case for reconsidering how modern technology affects youth, particularly in relation to anxiety, depression, and selfharm. The review

highlights these urgent issues, calling for societal and policy-level responses to protect future generations. After understanding this book Tobias (2024) came up with the conclusion that the well-being of young people has significantly declined over the past 15 years for two main factors: imense use of social network reduced valid play and real-life social interaction. Focusing mainly on adolescent girls, he highlight Haidt confirmation to children are overprotected in this busy world. He measures that the minimum age for social network should not exceed to 16, enforcing age limits more strictly and encouraging offline activities. Although acknowledging some benefits of social network, he emphasizes the negative impacts of features like unbounded scrolling and push notifications particularly on youth brain development. He account backed by empirical studies, theoretical analysis, and anecdotal evidence calls for urgent debate and thoughtful regulation to mitigate social media's harms.

By understanding this debate Balon and Richard (2024) walk around Jonathan Haidt's text *An Anxious Generation* and observe the decline in youth mental health, especially among Gen Z in relation to increased smartphone and use of social media. It reduced unstructured offline activity. Haidt squabble the amalgamation of overprotection in this actual world and underprotection in the virtual world has created a crisis, particularly affecting children born after 1995. The book recognize key societal changes in which shifting of play-based childhood to a phone-based childhood create a serious issue. Haidt calls for urgent reforms including belated social media access and increased offline engagement to reverse the trends in anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues among adolescents. Elina and Caroline (2024) looks at the hidden benefits of social media-based interventions for promoting mental health among adolescents and young adults, particularly those marginalized in mental health care. They suggest that further research is needed to understand the original mechanisms and develop effective interventions to mitigate the negative effects of social media on mental health. According to Mckay, Mary & Bannon (2024) explores the importance of engaging families in child mental health care.They highlights the benefits of family involvement, including improved treatment outcomes and increased support for children with mental health issues. They use strategies for engaging families, such as collaborative care models and family-based therapies. They also discusses the challenges and limitations of family engagement and provides recommendations for promoting effective family involvement in child mental health care.

The work on term anxiety is not flourised now but past studies also revolves around concept of fear, depression, anxiety and painful thought. Armstrong, Hill & Secker (2025) conducted a research and talked about issues among young people and gave report of World Health Organization (WHO) in which adults of 19 years effected by mental disoder with depression, anxiety illness and disability peoples aree discussed. Thus this anxiety disoder affect approximately 4.4% in fourteen years adult and 5.5% in 19 years old adults..Factors contributing to mental health Issues are social network, family distant, peer relationship, trauma, adversity, academic pressure, resource and support.. They suggest that use of excessive social network is linked to increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. The results highlight the need for further research to understand the underlying mechanisms and develop effective interventions to mitigate the negative effects of social network on mental health.

**Methodology**

Through the qualitative research, the analysis is based on discours analysis( interpret cultural and social contexts of Haidt's text) and textual analysis( close reading, discursive strategies and rhetorical devices).

**Discourse Analysis and the construction of Anxiety**

Discourse analysis refer to the study of spoken or written language in use, spotlight on use of language to convey meaning within social network. It highlight the structure content, and meaning of language in communication, considering elements such as text coherence ,speech acts, conversational implicature and discourse markers. Discourse analysis often involves examining patterns of language use, power dynamics, cultural norms and how these factors influence communication and interpretation in various contexts such as intervies ,conversations, media texts and political discourse. While Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short explain that discourse is an interpersonal activity between a speaker and a hearer. The discourse analysis of Jonathan Haidt book interpret following rehotical analysis of anxiety.

- "It feels like the only way to remove social media and the smartphone from life is to move to a deserted island".

In this line "deserted island" symbolizes extreme isolation, that emphasis on how ingrained social media has become in daily life. It suggests the incidence of technology and the difficulty of choosen dreastic measures. It also interpret empathy and stress about modern parenting challenges.

- "Most parents don't want their children to have a phone-based childhood, but somehow the world has reconfigured itself so that any parent who resists is condemning their children to social isolation". In these lines Haidt use irony that parents try to proctect their kids might involuntarily harm them socially. The word "reconfigured" indicates a universal, systemic and uncontrollable shift in norms. It draw attention to corecive power of collective behaviors.

- "When we look at data through 2015, there's a big problem". Here Haidt use foreshadowing that prepares the listener or reader for empirical evidence to prop up claims. The use of word " data" entail objectivity and factuality. It encourages trust by promising rational evidence.

- "The daily life, consciousness, and social relationships of 13-year olds with iphones in 2013 ere profoundly different from those of 13 year olds withflip phones in 2007" . Haidt use juxtaposition by comparing pre and post smartphones worlds. The main focus on youth frames adolsecence as especially vulnerable to tech changes. Just a gap of six years show a huge transformation, implying rapid societal change.

- "We now call that generation Gen Z, in contrast to the millennial generation, which had largely finished puberty when the Great Rewiring began in 2010" Great Rewiring" use a metaphorically evokes both neurological change and societal transformation.The historical marker of 2010 is framed as a pivotal year for cultural evolution. It focus on buberty underlines psychological vulnerability during tech exposure. The discourse analysis labeling names of generation tha give identity and suggests shared traits.

- "Play is the work of childhood , and all young mammals have the same job: Wire up your brain by playing vigorously and often". Haidt use biological framork that refers to "all young mammals", grounding the argument in evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. Words "Wire up your brain" implies necessity and urgency for natural development. Using of metaphor "play is the work of childhood" refers play as essential labor for developmental growth, not leisure.

- "In unsupervised, child-led play where children best learn to tolerate bruises, handle their emotions, read other children's emotions, take turns, resolve conflicts and play fair". It portrays unstructures play as a foundational training ground for life skills. It contrast what's lost in supervised or screen based experiences. In these lines multiple vital social-emotional skills, showing the richness of unsupervised play.

- "The reduction is so severe that we might refer to smartphones and tablets in the hands of children as experiences blockers". Experiences blockers metaphorically framing technology that inhabits learning and natural growth while words "So severe" signals an urgent problem.

- "Social media platforms, which are engineered for engagement ,hijack social learing and drowwn out the culture of one's family and local community while locking children's eyes onto influencers of questionable value". In fluencers of questionable value" frame digital role models, invoking concern about children's exposure. Haidt use loaded verbs here like Hijack ,Drown out, and locking that suggest manipulative and forceful actionss.

- "Children are born with two innate learning programs that help them to acquire their local culture: Conformist bias motivates them to copy whatever seems most common, and prestige bias motivates them to copy whoever seems most accomplished and prestigious". Haidt use scientific framing that refers to cognitive psychological concepts to sound authoritative and factual.Its duality in these lines prestige bias to show two sides of adaptive learning that are vulnerable to online influence.

- "The sequential introduction of age-appropriate experiences, tuned to sensitive periods and shared with same-age peers, had been the norm during the era of play –based childhood". Haid focuses on "sensitive periods" suggest that technology disruption has long term impacts. The "Era of play-based childhood" remind a golden past. It entail a cultural deviation from what was developmentally ideal or natural.

- "If we really want to keep our children safe, we should delay their entry into the virtual world and send them out to play in the real world instead.." The main idea of this line goes to development of child in the context of deigital versus real-world experiences. Haidt explain delaying children's exposure to the virtual world and emphasizes the benefits of real world challenges and learning.Words like "instead" mark clear dissimilarity between what is currently happening and what the author advocates.

- "Children are intrinsically antifragile, which is why Overprotected children are more likely to become adolescents who are stuck in defend mode". The text interpret a critical posture toward modern parenting and education drift that favor safety and screen time over risk and exploration. It analys "overproctection", "safetyism"and early digital exposure advocating instead for resilience, exploration and physical activity.

- Phrases like "Neurons that fire together, wire together, and "safetyism is an experience blocker" utilize metaphorical language to make complex scientific or psychological ideas more relevant. They give meaning that repeatedly activities activate constellation of neurons and connect them more closely.

- "A society that is large, diverse, and secular (such as the United States or the U.K.) might still agree to a set of Milestones that mark stepwise increases in freedoms and Responsibilities". The reference to the United states or the U.K situates the debate within western, liberal democracies. It also alludes to ordinary cultural milestones like rites of passage or educational transitions without naming them, relying on shared cultural knowledge.

- "When we make children's safety a quasi-sacred value and Don't allow them to take any risks, we block them from Overcoming anxiety, learning to manage risk, and learning To be self-governing, all of which are essential for Becoming healthy and competent adults". Thus Haidt use formal and instructive language but it making more impassioned especially phrases like "quasi-sacred value" and "wander Around". Words like "milestones" freedom, responsibilities, may reinforce key ideas. While phrases "Rites of passage", "antifragility", "self governance" introduced as remarkable maturity..

- "Governments are literally criminalizing the play-based childhoods that were the norm before the 1990s" The text interpret how childhood has been redefined by economic, legel and technological system since the 1990s. Infact it fram presents a nostalgic comparison as modern restriction and past freedom. Thus governments should proctect against actual and not overregulate normal child behaviour. Phrases like "race to the bottom" "criminalizing" and "legislation force them" build up the rhetorical impact.

## Analyzing Hadith's Text and context

By analyzing Haidt's work *An Anxious Generation* a number of rhetorical devices are employed to effectively express the author's arguments and give impact of smartphones and social network on the mental health of young people. Here are some rhitorical devices of anxiety that use in this book.

**Ethos**: Ethos refer the character or fundamental values of a person, people , culture or movement. It appeals integrity, reliability and authority of the orator or writer to sway audience. The goal of using ethos is to establish the speaker's or writer's expertise, character and credibility, showing the audience more receptive to their message.Thus, Haidt institute credibility by allude to his own research and expertise in the field of social pscychology.

**Pathos:** Pathos means a quality in art, speech or writing that evokes pity, sadness or compassion.Haidt use this term in his book that refer to the capability of a work of art to make the reader feel, pity, tenderness or sorrow. He entitle emotion by highlighting the personal stories and struggle of young people affected by anxiety and depression.

**Logos**: Logos appeals to logic, reason, and evidence to persuade the audience. The goal of using logos is to present a logical and well structured argument supported by facts, data and reasoning. Thus, Haidt utilize statistical data and research finding to hold up his arguments concerning the correlation between the use of smartphone and mental health issues.

**Allusion:** Allusion is a brief reference to a person, event, work or anything or giving a brief reference of anything .It is an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicity.It is used to convey complex ideas, evoke emotions and create connections by referncing familiar things in a concise

manner.In "The Anxious Generation"Haidt valor allude to historical or cultural references to present context and depth to his arguments.

**Causality:** it is principle that every event or change has a cause that leads to an effect.It means that one thing directly results from another. It cause relationship between cause and effect that help us understand how and why things happen.Haidt squabble that the increase rate of smartphones and social netwwork has caused an increase in anxiety and depression among young people, using causal reasoning to support his claims.

**Metaphor**: A figure of speech that compares two unlike things describing one as if it were like the other. It make direct comparisons between two unrelated things to highlight similarities..His uses of metaphor describe the impact of smartphones on young people's lives such as contrasting social media to a "wildfire" that spreads quickly and uncontrollably.

**Conclusion**

This research highlights the ways in which Haidt uses language and rhetorical strategies to construct a narrative of anxiety and technological determinism. The analysis also reveals the power dynamics and social and cultural contexts that shape Haidt's discourse . By wrap up above discussion it is concluded that the anxious generation is a complex issue that entail a nuanced and multifaceted approach. While Haidt's thesis provides a priceless perspective on the collision of smartphones and social network on mental health but is essential to judge the broader communal and cultural context in which such technologies are used. By examining the complex relationships between technology, anxiety, and mental health, we can build up a deeper understanding of the issues and work towards creating better and supportive environment for infantile people. By examining the collision of smartphones and social network on intellectual health create negative consequences. This research explore the role of social network in the mental health crisis facing young people and identified strategies for justifying the negative consequences and also examine the role of parenting and education in mitigating the pessimistic consequences of excessive screen time and social network use. The parenting policy, educational approaches, and school-based interventions  can promote healthy technology use habits and reduce the negative penalty of excessive screen time and social netwwork usage.

**Findings**

The main findings of this research are:

• unnecessary screen time and social network use are correlated to negative mental health outcomes. Research has shown that discourse analysis of Haidt's book show that excessive screen time and social network use are related to increased symptoms of anxiety, sadness and other mental health issues.

• Parenting and education participation is a critical function in promoting healthy knowledge use habits. Using rhetorical devices or strategies parenting styles and educational approaches can influence children's technology use and alleviate the negative consequences of too much screen time and social network use.

• Child life should be "play free child" rather than "phone base child". So in shaping his personality,schools can play a critical role in promoting healthy technology use habits. Schools can execute phone-free zones, technology-free days, and provide mental health support and resources to promote healthy technology use habits and mitigate the negative consequences of too much screen time and social netwwork use.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research the following recommendations are made:

• Parents and caregivers should set obvious boundaries and expectations for technology use.

• Adolescents should integrate technology literacy and digital citizenship into their teaching practices to help children use technology in a more informed way.

• Mental health support and resources should be provide to help children and adolescents manage the negative consequences of unnecessary screen time and social network use and to escape from anxiety and depression.

**Future Research Directions**

Future research should investigate the following areas:

- Futher research can explore the impact of unnecessary screen time and social network use on mental health in different populations, including children, adolescents, adults and mostly toddler after 2020.
- Research can investigate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting healthy technology use habits, including parenting styles, educational approaches, and school-based interventions.
- Research should investigate the role of technology in promoting intellectual health and well-being, make use of of technology to provide intellectual health support and resources.

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