



A Sociological Investigation of Social Anxiety in the Risk Age: A Documentary Analysis of Environmental Insecurity and Digital Insecurity in the Contemporary World

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ABSTRACT

The present study, entitled "A Sociological Investigation of Social Anxiety in the Risk Age: In recent decades, human society has increasingly confronted two fundamental forms of insecurity: first, environmental crises such as climate change, drought, air pollution, and the depletion of natural resources, which pose a serious threat to human life; and second, digital insecurities including cyberattacks, privacy violations, and the expansion of technological surveillance, which undermine the psychological and social security of individuals. These two domains appear distinct on the surface, yet at a deeper level they converge on a common point: the production of social anxiety and the reproduction of fear of an uncertain future. Employing a documentary analysis approach within the theoretical framework of Ulrich Beck's "Risk Society" and the sociology of emotions, this research investigates the representation of environmental and digital insecurities in scientific, media, and policy documents. The findings indicate that social anxiety is not merely an individual reaction but a social and structural phenomenon reproduced through the salience of threats in public discourse and deficiencies in institutional management. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that factors such as policy transparency, enhancement of environmental and digital literacy, institutional trust, social capital, and resilience education can play a fundamental role in reducing social anxiety. Based on the findings, it can be asserted that social anxiety in the risk age reflects the manner in which societies confront modern threats, and its management requires a combination of sustainable environmental policies, efficient digital security, and the strengthening of cultural and social capacities. This study, by revealing the sociological dimensions of social anxiety, can contribute to the design of effective social and cultural policies aimed at mitigating the psychological and social consequences of contemporary threats.

Introduction

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The contemporary world confronted with rapid technological transformations and environmental crises that have affected human life in various dimensions. The increase in pollution, climate change, and the limitation of natural resources, on the one hand, and the ever-growing expansion of the digital sphere, on the other, have given rise to a form of structural social anxiety.

Ulrich Beck has termed this the "Risk Age"; by introducing this concept, he demonstrates that risks are no longer confined to natural and technological

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threats but have been elevated to a social and global level, directly impacting both collective and

individual human life. This situation is such that crises are not merely anxiety-inducing by virtue of their objective and material nature, but their media representation and social reflection also play a decisive role in reinforcing the sense of insecurity. Among these, two fundamental domains namely environmental insecurities and digital insecurities have exerted greater influence than other areas on the formation of social anxiety and have affected the everyday life of contemporary humans (Fazeli, 2018). This anxiety is no longer merely an individual experience; rather, it is a reflection of the social, economic, and political conditions that

emerge in interaction with technology and the environment. Environmental crises have given rise

to collective and individual concerns regarding an uncertain future and play an effective role in the reproduction of social anxiety. Simultaneously, the digital sphere, with its extensive access to information, social networks, and cyber threats, has provided a new arena for the emergence of social concerns. In confronting these two sources of threat, individuals experience anxiety and concern not only about the future but also about their social stability and personal security. In this context, Foucault also maintains that institutions and official discourses, through the production of knowledge and power, can contribute to the reproduction of feelings of insecurity and social anxiety (Foucault, 1996). On the other hand, the sociology of emotions, as articulated by Araste, emphasizes that anxiety is a social and historical experience that holds a significant place within everyday life and social structures. These two distinct domains environmental and digital converge at a common point: the production and reproduction of social anxiety. The anxiety arising from an uncertain future, whether in the face of climate change or digital threats, has become a structural element of everyday life (Araste, 2002). Another critical dimension in the analysis of social anxiety in the risk age is the issue of social trust and social capital. When citizens believe that official institutions lack the capacity to manage environmental or digital crises, the level of public trust declines. This reduction in trust not only undermines the effectiveness of policy-making but also leads to the erosion of social capital (Fazeli, 2018). Under these conditions, social anxiety not only fails to subside but is reproduced in a cyclical manner, fueling mistrust, pessimism, and social isolation. Ultimately, this process threatens social solidarity and destabilizes cultural cohesion. Therefore, social anxiety in the risk age is a combination of objective experiences, media representations, and institutional structures. This phenomenon demonstrates that risks are not merely external realities but acquire meaning through discursive and media processes and become entrenched in the collective mindset. From this perspective, a sociological analysis of social anxiety is an undeniable necessity, as it can illuminate how scientific, media, and political discourses reproduce anxiety and insecurity and what consequences this reproduction has for trust, solidarity, and social stability. In Iranian society, the growing concerns about personal data security on social networks, communication restrictions, and cyber threats have given rise to technological anxieties. According to a study by the Majlis Research Center (2021), approximately 58% of urban respondents identified environmental threats (particularly the water crisis and air pollution) and 62% identified digital threats as the most significant sources of social anxiety. This situation indicates that digital insecurity, similar to environmental crises, is reproduced not

only at the individual level but also at the collective level and directly impacts the sense of social security. The media play a key role in this process. On the one hand, they are responsible for raising awareness and informing the public about threats; on the other hand, through the continuous representation of crises, they contribute to the intensification of social anxiety. Furthermore, in Iran, research has shown that environmental and digital concerns, at both the individual and collective levels, have led to a decline in social trust and changes in everyday behaviors. In conclusion, the aggregate of these statistics indicates that social anxiety in the present era results from the overlap of the environmental and digital domains. Despite their substantive differences, these two domains converge on a common point: the production and reproduction of widespread feelings of insecurity and social anxiety. From this perspective, contemporary society can be characterized as an "anxiety society"—a society in which individuals' lived experiences are interwoven not only with fear of an uncertain environmental future but also with security concerns in the digital space. The present study, through documentary analysis of this situation, seeks to elucidate the mechanisms of formation of this structural anxiety and to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for social policy-making and crisis management.

Research Questions

- ✓ Are there significant similarities and differences between the representation of environmental insecurity and digital insecurity?
- ✓ What factors are effective in reducing social anxiety arising from environmental and digital insecurities?
- ✓ Can education and the enhancement of media and digital literacy contribute to the reduction of social anxiety?

Significance and Necessity of the Research

In the contemporary era, the world faces the most complex and multifaceted social, environmental, and technological crises. Climate change, increasing environmental pollution, the destruction of natural resources, and crises arising from water scarcity, on the one hand, and the expansion of digital technologies, social networks, and cyber threats, on the other hand, have laid the groundwork for the production of a structural form of social anxiety that is no longer confined to individual experiences but has become a macro-characteristic of modern society. Social anxiety, particularly in societies confronting simultaneous environmental and digital crises, affects not only individual psychology but also social cohesion, social capital, and institutional trust. In this context, Ulrich Beck's Risk Society theory demonstrates that modernity, rather than

reducing risks, itself generates new threats. These threats are not directly observable, transcend geographical boundaries, and have global consequences. Moreover, Michel Foucault, in his analyses of power and discourse, emphasizes that institutions and media, through specific modes of representing reality, play an essential role in shaping feelings of insecurity and social anxiety. The sociology of emotions, by demonstrating that anxiety is not merely an individual and psychological matter but a collective and historical experience, provides a foundation for a more social understanding of this phenomenon. The combination of these three theoretical approaches highlights the significance of the sociological analysis of social anxiety in the present context.

The significance of this research is also undeniable from a global perspective. According to reports from the United Nations and international research centers, over 36% of the world's population experiences some degree of environmental anxiety, and 64% of internet users express significant concern regarding the security of their personal data. These statistics indicate that two seemingly distinct domains environmental and digital converge at a common point and give rise to the formation of an anxiety society on a global scale. In Iran, this situation is experienced in a particularly complex manner. Environmental crises such as drought, dust storms, and air pollution in many regions of the country have become daily concerns for the population, leaving significant psychological and social consequences. According to a report by the Majlis Research Center in 2022, at least 28 provinces in the country experience some degree of water stress. Furthermore, the expansion of the digital sphere and the widespread use of social networks, accompanied by weak protective legislation regarding personal data protection, have increased feelings of insecurity and mistrust among users. The large-scale leakage of data from millions of Iranian user accounts is an example of this situation, which further reinforces social anxiety. The combination of these two categories of insecurity environmental and digital has created a unique experience of social anxiety in Iranian society, the scientific understanding of which is an unavoidable necessity. From a practical perspective, this research is also of considerable importance. Documentary analysis of crises and their representation in media, policies, and scientific documents can illuminate the mechanisms of social anxiety production and provide a basis for offering practical solutions to mitigate it. These solutions may include public education and awareness-raising, strengthening media and digital literacy, establishing institutional transparency, reinforcing protective legislation, and modifying media representation practices. Such measures would not only reduce the level of social anxiety but also

enhance social resilience and strengthen public trust in institutions. From an applied standpoint, this research holds particular significance for social and cultural policy-making. Understanding the mechanisms of social anxiety production can assist governmental institutions, media, and civil society organizations in designing more effective strategies for managing this anxiety. Public education, enhancement of media and digital literacy, institutional transparency, enactment of personal data protection laws, and positive-oriented representation of crises are among the measures that can contribute to reducing social anxiety. Ultimately, the necessity of this research lies in its potential to enable Iranian sociology to offer a deeper understanding of the "anxiety society" while remaining aligned with global theoretical frameworks. This research can not only contribute to the production of indigenous knowledge in the field of risk and emotion sociology, but its findings can also assist policymakers in identifying pathways to reduce social anxiety and enhance societal resilience in the face of environmental and digital crises.

Overall Objective and Specific Objectives

The overall objective of this research is to conduct a sociological investigation of social anxiety in the risk age through documentary analysis of environmental insecurity and digital insecurity in the contemporary world. The specific objectives include:

- ✓ Examining the similarities and differences between the representation of environmental insecurity and digital insecurity.
- ✓ Investigating the factors effective in reducing social anxiety arising from environmental and digital insecurities.
- ✓ Proposing solutions for reducing social anxiety in society.

Theoretical Framework

This article draws upon multiple theoretical perspectives, including the works of Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault, Arlie Russell Hochschild, Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, Émile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton, Robert Putnam, Niklas Luhmann, Zygmunt Bauman, Bryant, and Bailey.

Ulrich Beck maintains that late modernity, through the production of new risks, has propelled society into a stage of "global risk." These risks operate beyond geographical boundaries and possess an invisible, uncontrollable, and often unpredictable nature. Prominent examples include climate change, water crises, air pollution, and cyber threats. In Iran, the increase in environmental problems such as Tehran's air pollution and the drying up of lakes exemplifies these modern risks that produce social anxiety. From Beck's perspective, anxiety is not an

individual experience but a consequence of the modern social structure (Beck,2008:100).

Anthony Giddens explains that reflexive modernity causes human decisions to invariably entail unintended consequences. These consequences, including environmental threats and new technologies, reduce existential security and increase social anxiety. For example, the development of digital technologies in Iran has not been accompanied by comprehensive data protection laws, leading to fear and anxiety among users (Giddens,2003:78).

Michel Foucault contends that power and knowledge are always intertwined, and that media and institutions, through specific representations, produce and reproduce social anxiety. In Iran, the highlighting of environmental crises in media and social networks can simultaneously raise awareness and generate collective anxiety. This theory helps analysts understand that social anxiety is not merely the result of real dangers, but that social and political representations also play a role in it (Foucault,2001:102).

Arlie Russell Hochschild demonstrates that emotions, including anxiety, are products of social interactions and institutional structures. She further argues that emotions are always linked to politics and power and cannot be regarded solely as individual experiences. For example, the anxiety of Iranian social media users in the face of news about environmental crises or digital disruptions is a combination of individual experience and social pressures (Hochschild,2015:56).

Douglas and Wildavsky maintain that risks are not merely objective realities but also cultural constructs. The norms, values, and cultural attitudes of each society determine what is considered dangerous. In Iran, the culture of water and energy consumption, as well as social beliefs about new technologies, directly influence the experience of social anxiety (Douglas & Wildavsky,2011:120).

Durkheim and Merton employ the concept of anomie to explain normative crisis. They demonstrate that the disjunction between cultural goals and institutional means generates social anxiety. For instance, the absence of long-term planning for managing environmental crises or regulating the digital space in Iran can lead to normative instability and heightened anxiety (Durkheim,2023:88; Merton,2016:142).

Robert Putnam maintains that the decline of social trust and social capital renders society vulnerable to risks. For example, the weakness of public trust in environmental policies and data management increases social anxiety (Putnam,2020:210).

Niklas Luhmann states that complexity and uncertainty within social systems lead to the reproduction of risk and anxiety. Iran's political and economic systems, with their high complexity, sometimes lack the capacity to respond to

environmental and technological threats, which in turn generates social anxiety (Luhmann,2014:67).

Zygmunt Bauman contends that consumer society and liquid life create a constant sense of instability and social anxiety. In Iran, media and digital consumption have profoundly affected everyday life and the experience of crises, intensifying anxiety (Bauman, 2003: 58; Bauman,2017:103).

Bryant and Bailey demonstrate that environmental issues are intricately intertwined with politics and power. The imbalance of power and structural inequalities has led to a significant increase in environmental anxiety in various societies, including Iran (Bryant & Bailey,2006:144).

Literature Review

Mo'idfar and Zolfaghari (2012) in their study entitled "An Investigation of the Phenomenon of Social Anxiety among Students: The Role of Globalization and New Media" demonstrated that phenomena such as "globalization" (the influx of global values and risks into everyday life) and exposure to "new media" have created new contexts for the emergence of novel forms of anxiety, including social anxiety. This finding situates social anxiety within the broader context of "modernity."

Neshat Doost and Tahmasebi (2013) in their study entitled "The Relationship between Attachment Styles and Social Anxiety with Regard to the Moderating Role of Virtual Space" showed that phenomena such as "globalization" (the influx of global values and risks into everyday life) and exposure to "new media" have provided new contexts for the manifestation of new forms of anxiety, including social anxiety. These findings place social anxiety within the broader framework of "modernity."

Fathi and Mahdavi (2014) in their study entitled "The Representation of Social Anxiety in Iranian Cinema: A Content Analysis of Films from the 2000s and 2010s" concluded that social anxiety has become a recurring cultural theme in recent decades, reflecting the concerns and tensions of modern life in Iranian society.

Delavar and Asadzadeh (2015) in their study entitled "The Effectiveness of Online Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy on Reducing Symptoms of Social Anxiety" demonstrated that Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) delivered online can be effective in reducing social anxiety symptoms. This finding suggests that the digital space is not inherently malevolent; rather, the manner and purpose of its use can make it both a source of the problem and a platform for its solution.

Rahimi and Shaghoian (2016) in their study entitled "Investigating the Impact of Social Networks on Social Isolation and Social Anxiety among Tehrani Youth" found that despite the apparent communicative function of social networks, excessive use of them can lead to "social isolation"

and a reduction in face-to-face communication skills, ultimately increasing social anxiety among young people.

Pouraetamad et al. (2017) in their study entitled "The Relationship between Social Capital and Social Anxiety in the Context of Virtual Space" demonstrated an inverse relationship between the decline of "social capital" (including factors such as interpersonal trust, sense of belonging, and support networks) in the virtual space and increased feelings of social anxiety. The more superficial and shallower virtual relationships become, the more feelings of loneliness and anxiety in social interactions increase.

Zarei and Aghaei (2018) in their study entitled "Predicting Social Anxiety Based on Social Phobia and Fear of Negative Evaluation among Virtual Space Users" concluded that among virtual space users, "fear of negative evaluation" is the strongest predictor of social anxiety levels. This finding emphasizes the central role of "social evaluation" as the core of social anxiety.

Mohammadi and Norouzi (2019) in their study entitled "Social Anxiety and Dimensions of Individual Identity in Virtual Space" through qualitative research found that virtual space can become a factor in social anxiety through the creation of "ambiguity and fragmentation in individual identity." When individuals present various idealized versions of themselves in virtual space, this can lead to confusion, lack of self-knowledge, and increased anxiety in real-world interactions.

Salimi and Farhadi (2020) in their study entitled "Investigating the Relationship between Internet Use and Social Anxiety among Students" found that pathological and uncontrolled use of the internet (internet addiction) correlates with higher levels of social anxiety. Individuals who have difficulty managing their time and how they use virtual space also experience greater anxiety in face-to-face interactions.

Ahmadi et al. (2021) in their study entitled "The Mediating Role of Fear of Negative Evaluation in the Relationship between Virtual Social Networks and Social Anxiety in Adolescents" demonstrated a positive relationship between the extent of virtual social network use and social anxiety. The primary mechanism of this relationship is the reinforcement of "fear of negative evaluation." In simpler terms, the competitive and performative nature of social networks constantly exposes users to judgment and comparison, increasing their anxiety in real-world interactions.

Anthony Giddens (1991) in his study entitled "Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age" found that in late modernity, identity is a reflexive project that the individual must continuously construct and maintain. This process, due to the erosion of stable traditions, leads to

uncertainty, existential anxiety, and feelings of insecurity. "Trust" in expert systems (such as science) is essential for reducing this anxiety, yet remains fragile.

Ulrich Beck (1992) in an article entitled "Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity" concluded that modern crises (such as environmental crises) are products of the modernization process itself. These risks are "impersonal," "global," and "incalculable," leading to the formation of a "diffuse anxiety" at the societal level, which is characteristic of the "Risk Age."

Glenn Albrecht (2011) in his study entitled "Chronic Environmental Change: Emerging Syndromes" introduced the concept of "Solastalgia": a form of grief and psychological distress experienced by individuals while remaining in their home and homeland, due to witnessing destructive environmental changes (such as mining or drought). This finding demonstrates the direct link between environmental insecurity and psychological harm.

Twenge (2018) in an article entitled "Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates among American Adolescents after 2010 and the Link to Increased New Media Screen Time" concluded that there is a significant temporal correlation between the widespread adoption of smartphones (after 2010) and the sharp increase in adolescent psychological distress. Adolescents who spend more time on digital devices are significantly more likely to experience depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and feelings of loneliness.

Katie Hayes et al. (2018) in a study entitled "Climate Change and Mental Health: Risks, Impacts, and Priority Actions" concluded that climate change produces a wide range of mental health impacts, both direct (such as PTSD from natural disasters) and indirect. The most significant indirect impact is the emergence of feelings of "grief," "loss," "fear," "anger," and "helplessness" in the face of a major global threat.

Panu Pihkala (2020) in an article entitled "Anxiety and Environmental Crisis: An Analysis of Eco-Anxiety and Climate Anxiety" found that environmental anxiety is not necessarily a disorder or illness but can be a natural and adaptive response to real and existential threats. This anxiety can manifest in two forms: paralyzing (leading to despair and isolation) or activating (leading to activism and action to address the crisis).

Susan Clayton (2020) in her study entitled "Climate Anxiety: Psychological Responses to Climate Change" concluded that climate anxiety is more prevalent among young people, women, and those who have stronger emotional connections to nature. This anxiety is significantly intensified by feelings of loss of personal control and perceptions of the inadequacy of collective and governmental actions to address the crisis.

Kennedy and Jensen (2020) in an article entitled "Adolescent Mental Health in the Digital Age" found that although the relationship between digital use and mental health is weak to moderate, this relationship is bidirectional and particularly strong for certain groups. Adolescents who already struggle with mental health issues (including social anxiety) are more drawn toward problematic use of virtual space, and this use further exacerbates their difficulties.

Patti Valkenburg (2021) in her article entitled "Social Media and Anxiety: A Systematic Review" concluded that the relationship between social media and anxiety is complex, yet several key mechanisms have been identified: (1) upward social comparison (comparing oneself to "better" others, leading to reduced self-esteem), (2) fear of missing out (FOMO), and (3) the direct experience of online harassment (cyberbullying), which is the strongest predictor of anxiety.

Paul Bennett and Evan Williams (2021) in their study entitled "Digital Risk Society: A Critical Review of the Literature on Digital Risks and Mental Health" found that contemporary society has become a "digital risk society," where the inherent risks of digital technologies (such as systematic privacy violations, widespread surveillance, the spread of misinformation, and the addictive design of platforms) directly impact mental health, leading to the formation of new forms of anxiety, distrust, and distress.

Summary

Social anxiety in contemporary society is no longer merely an individual psychological issue, but rather a profoundly sociological phenomenon rooted in the systematic and structural risks of the present era. Numerous theories and studies exist in this field. For example, Beck argues that late modernity, through the production of new risks, has propelled society into a stage of "global risk." He maintains that these risks operate beyond geographical boundaries and possess an invisible, uncontrollable, and often unpredictable nature. Furthermore, from Beck's perspective, anxiety is not an individual experience but a consequence of the modern social structure. Giddens believes that reflexive modernity causes human decisions to invariably entail unintended consequences; these consequences, including environmental threats and new technologies, reduce existential security and increase social anxiety. Foucault contends that power and knowledge are always intertwined, and that media and institutions, through specific representations, produce and reproduce social anxiety. Hochschild argues that emotions, including anxiety, are products of social interactions and institutional structures, and that feelings are always linked to politics and power and cannot be regarded solely as individual experiences. Douglas and Wildavsky maintain that risks are not

merely objective realities but also cultural constructs, and that the norms, values, and attitudes of each society determine what is considered dangerous. Durkheim and Merton employ the concept of anomie to explain normative crisis, demonstrating that the disjunction between cultural goals and institutional means generates social anxiety. Robert Putnam maintains that the decline of social trust and social capital renders society vulnerable to risks. Niklas Luhmann states that complexity and uncertainty within social systems lead to the reproduction of risk and anxiety. Bauman contends that consumer society and liquid life create a constant sense of instability and social anxiety. Bryant and Bailey demonstrate that environmental issues are intricately intertwined with politics and power, and that the imbalance of power and structural inequalities have led to environmental anxiety.

Mo'idfar and Zolfaghari, in their research, identified phenomena such as globalization and exposure to new media as factors contributing to the emergence of social anxiety. Neshat Doost and Tahmasebi reached similar conclusions in their study. Fathi and Mahdavi found that social anxiety has become a recurring cultural theme in recent decades, reflecting the concerns and tensions of modern life in Iranian society. Delavar and Asadzadeh concluded that cognitive-behavioral therapy can be effective in reducing social anxiety symptoms, and further noted that the digital space is not inherently malevolent; rather, the manner and purpose of its use can make it both a source of the problem and a platform for its solution. Rahimi and Shaghoian found that despite the apparent communicative function of social networks, excessive use of them can lead to "social isolation" and a reduction in face-to-face communication skills, ultimately increasing social anxiety among young people. Pouraetamad et al. found an inverse relationship between the decline of social capital and increased feelings of social anxiety: the more superficial and shallower virtual relationships become, the more feelings of loneliness and anxiety in social interactions increase. Zarei and Aghaei concluded that among virtual space users, "fear of negative evaluation" is the strongest predictor of social anxiety levels. Mohammadi and Norouzi found that virtual space, through the creation of "ambiguity and fragmentation in individual identity," can become a factor in social anxiety. Salimi and Farhadi concluded that pathological and uncontrolled use of the internet (internet addiction) correlates with higher levels of social anxiety, meaning that individuals who have difficulty managing their time and how they use virtual space also experience greater anxiety in face-to-face interactions. Ahmadi et al. found a positive relationship between the extent of virtual social network use and social

anxiety, with the primary mechanism being the reinforcement of "fear of negative evaluation."

Anthony Giddens, in his research, found that in late modernity, identity is a reflexive project that the individual must continuously construct and maintain. This process, due to the erosion of stable traditions, leads to uncertainty, existential anxiety, and feelings of insecurity. Trust in expert systems is essential for reducing this anxiety, yet remains fragile. Ulrich Beck concluded that modern crises are products of the modernization process itself, and that these impersonal, global, and incalculable risks lead to the formation of a "diffuse anxiety" at the societal level. Albrecht introduced a form of grief and psychological distress experienced by individuals while remaining in their home and homeland due to witnessing destructive environmental changes, demonstrating the direct link between environmental insecurity and psychological harm. Twenge found that adolescents who spend more time on digital devices are significantly more likely to experience depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and feelings of loneliness.

Pihkala concluded that environmental anxiety is not necessarily a disorder or illness but can be a natural and adaptive response to real and existential threats, and that this anxiety can manifest in two forms: paralyzing or activating. Clayton found that climate anxiety is more prevalent among young people, women, and those who have stronger emotional connections to nature, and that this anxiety is significantly intensified by feelings of loss of personal control and perceptions of the inadequacy of collective actions. Kennedy and Jensen found that although the relationship between digital use and mental health is weak to moderate, this relationship is bidirectional and particularly strong for certain groups; adolescents who already struggle with mental health issues are more drawn toward problematic use of virtual space, and this use can further exacerbate their difficulties. Valkenburg concluded that the relationship between social media and anxiety is complex, yet several mechanisms can be identified: (1) social comparison, (2) fear of missing out, and (3) the direct experience of online harassment, which is the strongest predictor of anxiety. Paul Bennett and Evan Williams found that contemporary society has become a "digital risk society," where the inherent risks of digital technologies directly impact mental health, leading to the formation of new forms of anxiety, distrust, and distress.

Factors Affecting the Reduction of Social Anxiety Arising from Environmental and Digital Insecurities:

- ✓ **Transparent Policy-Making and Governance:** Transparency in information dissemination and the presentation of

practical action plans by governments and responsible institutions is one of the most important strategies for reducing social anxiety. When people know that authorities take crises seriously and have clear strategies for addressing them, they experience a greater sense of security. Conversely, concealment or incomplete information amplifies collective anxiety.

- ✓ **The Role of Media and Public Education:** If the media, instead of fueling fear and worry, provide scientific information and practical education to the public, they can contribute to enhancing environmental and digital literacy. This enables individuals to confront crises with greater preparedness and awareness rather than experiencing intense anxiety.
- ✓ **Strengthening Social Capital:** Social relationships based on trust, solidarity, and collective participation help individuals avoid feelings of isolation during critical times. The existence of support networks whether in the form of family, friends, or non-governmental organizations empowers individuals to better face threats and reduces their anxiety.
- ✓ **Psychological Resilience and Individual Skills:** Training in stress management, resilience, and coping with uncertain conditions plays a significant role in reducing anxiety at the individual level. These skills enable individuals to control their negative emotions and, instead of reacting emotionally, focus on practical solutions.
- ✓ **Technological Innovation and Digital Security:** The expansion of green technologies in the environmental domain and the strengthening of cybersecurity tools in the digital domain are among the factors that provide citizens with a greater sense of security. When individuals know that technology can be employed both to protect the environment and to safeguard their personal data, the anxiety arising from instability and insecurity diminishes.
- ✓ **Psychological Support and Social Services:** Access to counseling centers and mental health services, particularly for vulnerable groups, is of great importance. The availability of such facilities prevents individuals from experiencing psychological isolation and provides them with scientific strategies for reducing their anxiety.
- ✓ **International Cooperation and Agreements:** Many crises have a global nature, such as climate change or cyber threats. When people witness countries

cooperating in managing these crises, they feel that real solutions exist for global challenges. Such perceptions foster social hope and reduce anxiety about the future.

Conclusion

With the advent of the Risk Age, the contemporary world has encountered threats whose nature fundamentally differs from those of the past. Environmental crises such as climate change, water scarcity, and widespread pollution, on the one hand, and digital insecurities including cyber threats, extensive surveillance, and personal data breaches, on the other, have introduced a new dimension of uncertainty into social life. Although these two categories of insecurity appear distinct on the surface, they converge at a common point: the production of a constant sense of risk and anxiety about the future. The present study, entitled "A Sociological Investigation of Social Anxiety in the Risk Age: A Documentary Analysis of Environmental Insecurity and Digital Insecurity in the Contemporary World," seeks to examine the dimensions and mechanisms of social anxiety formation within the context of contemporary threats. The results obtained indicate that contemporary society, more than ever, is enmeshed in a form of "anxious existence" an existence in which the future is experienced not as a source of hope, but as a source of uncertainty and concern. The findings revealed that environmental insecurity and digital insecurity constitute two key domains in the production of this anxiety. Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective, the present study demonstrated that today's society is a clear instantiation of Ulrich Beck's "Risk Society" a society in which threats are global, intangible, and invisible, and this very characteristic transforms social anxiety into a structural experience. Moreover, the application of the sociology of emotions and theories related to collective feelings demonstrated that anxiety is not merely an individual psychological reaction but a social phenomenon shaped through the interaction of institutions, media, policies, and lived experiences. The findings of this research also indicate that the media, along with scientific and political discourses, play a fundamental role in the representation and amplification of these insecurities. For this reason, social anxiety is not merely the product of the objective realities of threats, but also the result of how these threats are represented and interpreted at the societal level. In Iran as well, numerous examples demonstrate that the coverage of the water crisis and cybersecurity issues in the media has a direct impact on feelings of insecurity and public anxiety. On the other hand, the investigations clarified that a set of factors can be effective in reducing this social anxiety, including transparency in policy-making, enhancement of environmental

and digital literacy, strengthening of social capital, increasing psychological resilience, expansion of clean technologies, enhancement of cybersecurity, and international cooperation. These factors will only be effective when they operate synergistically and in interaction with one another. In general, it can be concluded that contemporary society finds itself in a dual situation: on the one hand, it faces global and invisible threats that reproduce social anxiety; on the other hand, there exist capacities that can manage this anxiety and even transform it into an opportunity for strengthening social participation and collective solidarity. The present study emphasizes that without attention to the social and cultural dimensions of anxiety, policy-making in the domains of environment and technology will remain incomplete. Therefore, a sociological understanding of social anxiety in the Risk Age not only contributes to the theoretical richness of this field but can also serve as a guide for designing effective policies at both the national and global levels.

Strategies and Recommendations

To reduce risks and social anxiety in society, the following strategies and recommendations can be proposed:

- ✓ Establishing national early warning systems for environmental crises (such as drought and air pollution).
- ✓ Providing transparent and accurate information regarding cyber threats and methods of countering them.
- ✓ Incorporating environmental and digital security education into school and university curricula.
- ✓ Organizing public workshops for citizens on personal data management and environmental protection.
- ✓ Establishing local associations and networks for addressing environmental and digital issues.
- ✓ Government and civil society support for voluntary activities in the fields of environment and cybersecurity.
- ✓ Establishing social and psychological counseling centers to reduce collective anxiety during crises.
- ✓ Designing media programs to foster social hope and positive narratives about the future.
- ✓ Investing in green technologies and renewable energy to mitigate climate crises.
- ✓ Enhancing national-level cybersecurity through support for domestic technology start-ups.
- ✓ Teaching life skills and resilience to the younger generation in the face of environmental and digital threats.

- ✓ Designing training programs for emergency situations (such as climate crises or cyberattacks).

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to data analysis, drafting, and revising of the paper and agreed to be responsible for all the aspects of this work.

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