

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, FU JEN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

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# **Taiwanese undergraduates students' habit of using SNS (social networking system)**

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Research Paper, English Composition III

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Topic: Taiwanese undergraduate students' habit of using SNS (social networking system)

“Social networking system is a virtual place that caters to a specific population in which people of similar interest gather to communicate, share, and discuss ideas.” (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke) For instances, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are all well-known and widely-used social networking sites. According to *The Statistic Portal*, currently in 2015, there are 1.6 billion Internet users worldwide and more than 64% of them are accessing social networking websites. Among the large number of SNS users, Facebook has 1.415 billion users, Instagram has 0.30 billion users and Twitter has 0.288 billion users. The number is still climbing.

Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are the top 3 popular SNS among Taiwanese undergraduate students. These three SNS become very important communicational tools for the undergraduates' daily life nowadays. Although SNS is very convenient, some of the student-users complain about the consequences of using it because it causes stress, and makes them lose privacy and personal time. Instead of quitting using the SNS, a lot of the students flock to another SNS as alternative, yet it does not solve the problems. Why are some people not able to completely stop using the SNS? In this research paper, issues about the definition of SNS addiction, undergraduate students' habits in using the SNS, and the impacts of using SNS on their lifestyle were discussed.

Apparently, the large number of users reflect how useful and convenient SNS is. SNS form a back and forth internet interaction by pressing likes or leaving comments. However, over use of the SNS might harm one's health. In “Twitter is harder to resist than cigarettes and alcohol,” James Meikle mentioned that SNS is even more irresistible than cigarettes and alcohol. He also stated that comparing to sleep and sex which are normal people's strongest desires, the research result shows that people are more willing to give in to longings or craving to use SNS. “...self-disclosure communication stimulates the brain's pleasure centers much like sex and food do.” (qtd. in Walker)

What is SNS addiction? It is a hot issue being debated among many scholars. Normally, when people see this cluster, they will think of an SNS addict as someone who spends lots of time and energy on the SNS. Nevertheless, how much time is “a lot of time”? To some people, 2 hours is long; on the other hand, to some even 12 hours is not a big deal. Therefore, how much is a lot of time cannot be defined so easily. SNS after-use consequences have to be taken into consideration. “Generally, addictive behavior is defined as a repetitive habit pattern that increases the risk of disease and/or associated personal and social problems.” (qtd.

in Xu and Tan) In “What is Social Networking Addiction?” Lesile Walker defined addiction as a compulsive behavior that leads to negative effects.” Kuss and Griffiths came up with six elements related to biological, psychological and social factor including, mood modification, salience, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict and relapse. Hence, it is clear that whether the after-use effects are positive or negative is the key to judge if someone is an SNS addict.

What drives people to be obsessive about using SNS? These years, SNS become more and more popular. Xu and Tan argued that the increased accessibility of mobile devices such as smartphones and Pads is one of the triggers of the boosting numbers of the SNS users. There must be reasons for Facebook, the most popular one, having so many users around the world. If people go to friends and ask, “Do you have a Facebook account?” the answer will be “yes” most of the time. People who do not use SNS are minority. In addition, usually, some people even have accounts of two kinds of social networking systems. The first reason is that the SNS offers a very convenient channel, platform for the users to meet new friends, contacting old friends and for general socializing (Brandtzæg and Jan Heim). Secondly, owing to people’s egocentric construction, they tend to like using SNS because SNS offers the environment for them to present themselves in a good and positive way and thus raise their spirit and this is a pleasurable experience (Kuss and Griffiths). Furthermore, the article of “Facebook Fanaticism-A brief look at social networking addiction.” addressed that some users think SNS is an important mechanism to relieve one’s stress, loneliness or depression (qtd. in Griffiths). The motivation of SNS usage is various.

SNS might be a good invention because if it is not because of Facebook, the researcher does not think that she would be able to reconnect with an elementary school classmate who went to the States after graduation. Nonetheless, heavy use of SNS sure does lead to people’s mental disorder and risking one’s relationship.

To start with, the article, “Facebook is bad for you: Get a life,” states that “the more someone uses Facebook, the less satisfied he is with life.” Using Facebook is often related to jealousy, depression whereas jealousy is most common feeling of the users (Get a Life). The reason is that people are able to see what is going on around with their friends recently by reading their posts or pictures they uploaded. A friend might upload a picture of a luxurious room with the caption saying, “I am here to enjoy my life!” whereas you are staying up late, writing your paper. Noted that, your friend might consciously or unconsciously take the advantage of SNS to “raise her spirit” and you start becoming jealous. Also, SNS make people feel depressed. Renee Jacques said “Facebook makes you feel less positive about your

life.”

Next, the article, “Get a life,” also stated that beside jealousy and depression, the over use of the SNS also causes isolation and social tension. Those who spend longer time using SNS feel less secure about their real life communities (Kuss and Griffiths). Additionally, Kuss and Griffiths also pointed out that there are negative consequences for romantic relationship result from SNS usage. The over-disclosure of a couple’s private live on Facebook page lead to jealousy or even divorce. According to the Wall Street Journal, 20% married couples get divorced because of Facebook (qtd. in Walker). Many people nowadays prefer to hide behind the little square screen peeping others’ lives and the outside world. This forms isolation. Moreover, some people spend too much time on SNS and this risk their relationship with friends and family. Imagine two or three people hanging out together, but all of them keep swiping their mobiles checking if there are any online messages. What is the purpose of hanging out together? They can simply staying home and invite one another to a chatting room.

Based on the studies mentioned above, SNS has become an extremely popular cyber communication platform that we should no longer ignore. There is thus a need to examine college students’ habits of using the SNS. The purpose of this present study is to look closely into the Taiwanese undergraduates’ use of the SNS and its impact on their lifestyles. Due to the limited length of the article, the researcher narrowed down the SNS stadiums and only focused on three types of SNS in the study: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. In this research paper, there are 5 research questions:

- (1) What is the general SNS using habits of Taiwan undergraduate students?
- (2) Why do Taiwanese undergraduate students use SNS?
- (3) How long can Taiwanese undergraduate students tolerate not using SNS?
- (4) What are Taiwanese students’ perceptions on SNS?
- (5) How do Taiwanese undergraduate students’ lives change after using SNS?

These questions would help Taiwanese undergraduate students understand the positive and negative effects of using SNS and their using habits of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The findings of the study are believed to help the Taiwanese undergraduate students to adjust their habits of using SNS and improve their current lifestyles.

Studies related to habits of using SNS have been widely researched and discussed. However, this study is unique because it focused on one specific group which is undergraduate students in Taiwan. The supporting data was collected via online survey and

face-to-face interviews using convenient sampling and snowball sampling strategies.

The online questionnaire included general questions such as the personal information and the overall using habits, preference order of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as well as the respondents' views on SNS. Google Docs was the survey tool used to create the online questionnaire. After the questionnaire design was finished, it was distributed through the researcher's Facebook account and Line account. The online survey link was also widely shared by the researcher's friends' Facebook accounts.

As for the face to face interviews, the researcher interviewed SNS addicts with more in-depth questions about the influences and consequences of over using SNS on the addicts' lifestyle. The researcher picked 5 interviewees who were diagnosed with the symptom of SNS addiction from the survey pool randomly. The random selection ended when the researcher got 5 interviewees. The researcher contacted them through their email or FB account to get their permission for interviewing them. The researcher asked them what their habits of using SNS were like and how the habits had changed their lifestyles as well as some further questions based on their survey responses.

There were 100 valid online responses. 74 responses were from female and 26 were from male. Besides, there were 5 interviewees in total. The findings and the discussion were developed based on these collected data and information.

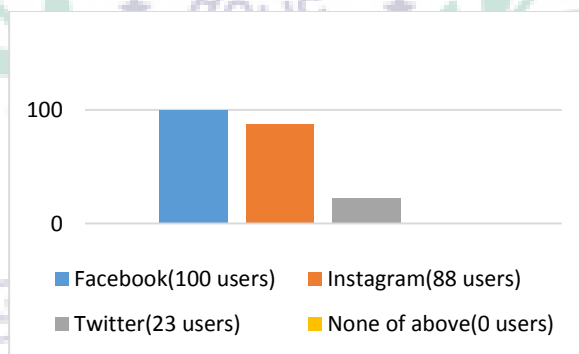


Fig. 1 What kinds of SNS are you using currently?

Among 100 respondents, Figure 1 points out that all of them were Facebook users and Instagram was the second popular SNS with 88 users. As for Twitter, it was the least popular one because there were only 23 users.

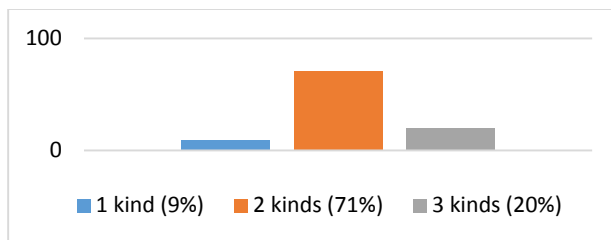


Fig. 2 How many SNS accounts do you have?

In Figure 2, it indicates that 9% of the respondents had only one SNS account, which was Facebook because all of the respondents were Facebook users based on Figure 1. Next, 71% of the respondents said that they had 2 kinds of SNS accounts which generally were Facebook and Instagram. Only 3 people out of the 71% respondents reported that they had Facebook and Twitter accounts instead of Instagram account. Last, 20% of people said that they had all 3 types of SNS.

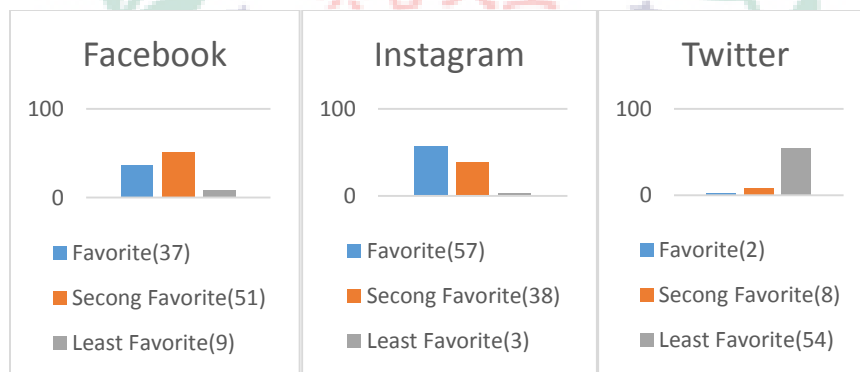


Fig. 3 Respondents' preference on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter

Figure 3 is offering the preference order of the three SNS: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter among the 100 respondents. According to the charts, 37 people chose Facebook as their favorite SNS while there were 57 of them choosing Instagram as their favorite SNS. Still, only 2 respondents liked Twitter the most.

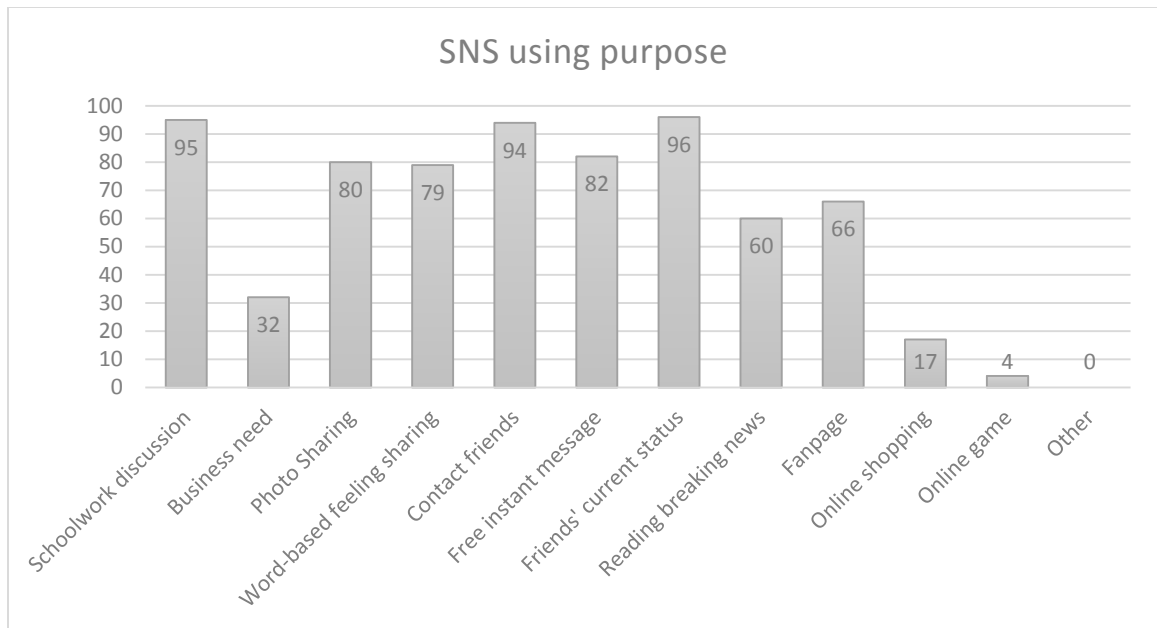


Fig. 4 Respondents' SNS using purpose

Referring to Figure 4, there are various purposes of why people use social networking system. The top 3 using purposes are listed below in order:

- ◆ 96 people chose “friends’ current status”.
- ◆ 95 people chose “schoolwork discussion”.
- ◆ 94 people chose “contact friends”.

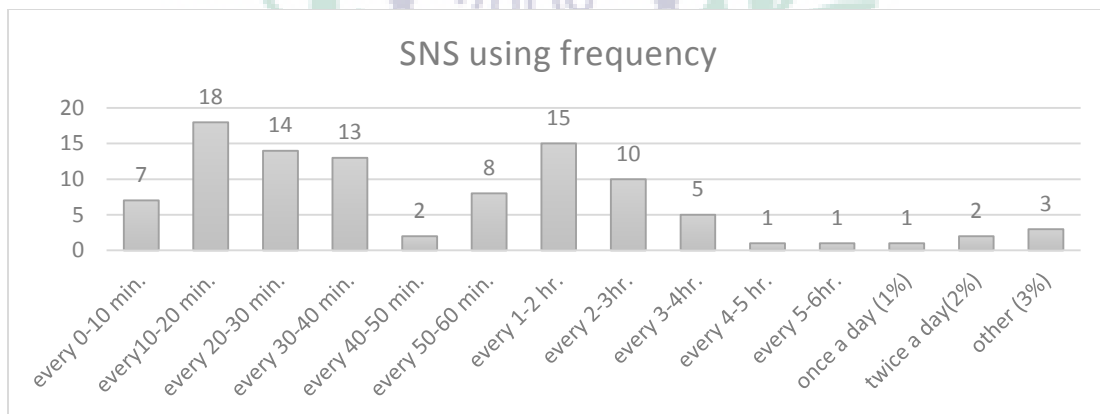


Fig. 5 Frequency of SNS checking

Figure 5 is illustrating the frequency of SNS checking among the 100 Taiwanese undergraduate respondents. In relation to the collected data, the frequency of SNS usage was quite different owing to different using habits and purposes. 3 of them checked “other”. It was because that they could not easily fit themselves in any given options. One wrote that she checked SNS every 2 to 3 hours in daytime; on the other hand, she kept checking SNS most

of the time during nighttime. The other two respondents responded that they checked SNS based on their moods or if they are unoccupied.

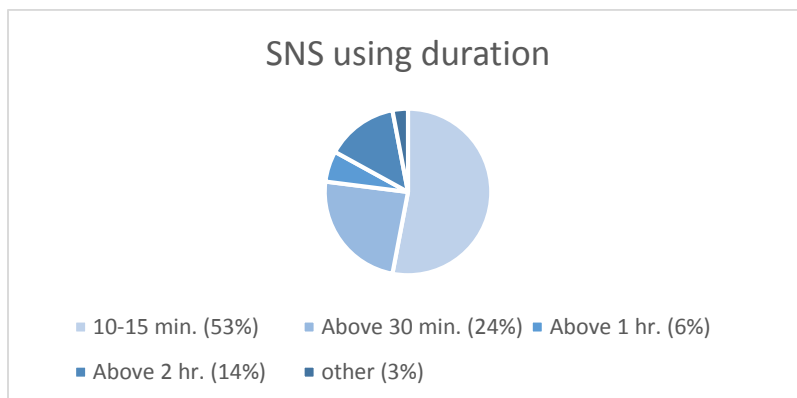


Fig. 6 SNS using duration

Fig 6 shows that there were 77% of the respondents using SNS for less than an hour each time; on the other hand, there were 20% of them saying that they used SNS for more than an hour each time. Moreover, 3 people checked “other”. Two people reported that they used SNS for only less than 30 minute. The other person said that she used SNS for 10 to 15 minutes during daytime while she kept using SNS all the time at night.

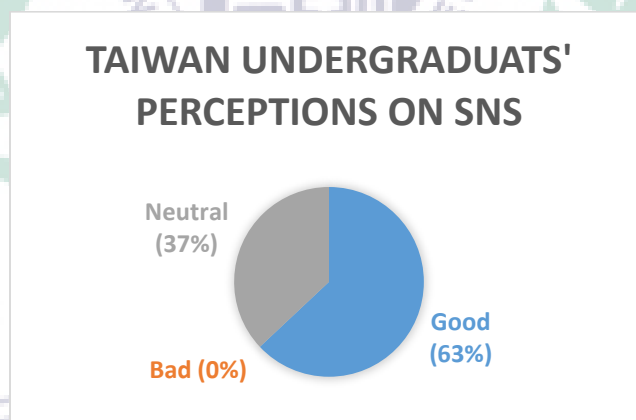


Fig. 7 Taiwan Undergraduates' perceptions on SNS

Figure 7 tells that 63% of the respondents thought SNS is a good communication platform in any aspects; on the other hand 37% of the people stayed neutral. However, none of them chose the “bad” option.

The online survey also asked for further explanations about their perceptions of SNS. There are two major advantages. One is that SNS is a very direct medium for information sharing. People receive various information and read breaking news shared by their friends or from the fan-pages they follow. The other good point is that it shortens the distances between



people. The users are able to contact their friends easily, especially when there is a need for schoolwork group discussion. Additionally, they can easily keep in touch with old friends and make new friends easily. As for the weaknesses, some stated that SNS make them feel a sense of anxiety and emptiness. Once they step out from the SNS world, they feel the disconnection with friends and the whole world. Besides, they do not have enough privacy as long as they start using SNS.

According to “Incredibly, Twitter Doubled In Size In The U.S. In 2012, Says Study [STATS]”, the number of active Twitter users in Taiwan reduced by more than 40% in 2012. Twitter is the least popular SNS among Taiwanese college students (see Fig. 1). It is surprised that no one use Twitter as a social tool. The Twitter users from the respondents spoke in unison that they use Twitter only for following famous stars’ accounts. They further explained that their friends mostly do not often use Twitter. They are unfamiliar with page design and it is a more word-based SNS comparing to Instagram, a photo sharing SNS. In additional, it is not as functional as Facebook; thus, it is the least popular SNS.

Illustrated by the statistics from *The Statistic Portal* mentioned above that the most popular SNS is Facebook, the second popular one is Instagram and the least popular one is Twitter. The researcher found out the same ranking of the popularity. Nevertheless, the preference order is different from the popularity order. Among all respondents, the most favorite SNS is Instagram, the second favorite SNS is Facebook and the least favorite SNS is Twitter (see Fig. 3). The ranking of Facebook and Instagram switch their places. According to the interviewees’ responses, friend is the pusher of building an FB account. They can contact with old friends and sharing their current lives through pictures and words. However, one of the interviewees said that most of the undergraduates use Facebook as a tool to discuss schoolwork. Therefore, they often has to add a lot of unacquainted people as friends for schoolwork discussion. Thus, her private life became overly exposed to numerous friends including unacquainted ones on Facebook. Yet Instagram offers more privacy. She had more flexibilities to select what she likes to read and follow. Furthermore, Instagram page design is clean without numerous information.

Based on the collected data, the undergraduates in Taiwan were so obsessed with SNS because it is convenient and informative. They checked SNS once in a while (see Fig. 5). Some could even use SNS for more than 2 hours in a row (see Fig. 6). Therefore, the researcher became curious about how long the undergraduate students could tolerate without using SNS. The results were varied and no consistency was found. Some could quit SNS for

an hour while some could quit for a couple of days and some even a month. Most of them felt bored and anxious without using SNS. One interviewee said that she felt guilty if she missed any important messages or information. One respondent said that if she stopped using SNS for too long, she could not catch up with her friends when they were chatting around because she did not know what was happening recently.

SNS also influences the students' lifestyle and relationship with other people. 4 interviewees had less time to sleep and 1 said that her eye-sight problem became worse. Also, 2 interviewees said that before they started using SNS, they used to read novels when they were free. Now SNS almost replaces their hobbies. The researcher asked them about if their friends or family had ever complained about their using habits of SNS. Out of the researcher's expectation, none of their friends, which were undergraduate students as well, complained about their SNS usage. On the other hand, the interviewees' parents' were opposite. Their parents thought that over using SNS was bad for their health and it was quite irritating if children kept browsing SNS pages during family time.

In conclusion, social networking system is a very convenient and informative communication platform while it also causes some negative effects on people's life. Based on the findings, overall undergraduate students in Taiwan thought SNS is good. Although SNS influenced their original lifestyle and their relationship with others, they still could not live without SNS. Eventually, the researcher discovered some limitation. While designing the online questionnaire, the researcher did not asked the respondents about their age whereas it might be an important factor because people of different ages might have different habits. Also, it is important to collect parents' perception on SNS as well so that the researcher could cross-examine the parents' and the students' perceptions on the issue about the use of SNS. Moreover, the researcher did not get enough responses from male respondents so it was impossible to discuss whether gender is a factor that might influence the findings. Thus, there is a need for further research considering age and parents' views as well as gender differences on SNS.

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## Appendix

**Online Survey**

Topic: Taiwanese undergraduate students' habit of using SNS (social networking system)

I am junior student, Amy Chiu, from FJU English department. Recently, I am working on my research paper about Taiwanese Undergraduate students' habit of using SNS (social networking system). I sincerely hope you can spend some time helping me to finish this questionnaire. These provided data will be taken very seriously and become very important evidences. This is an anonymous questionnaire and we will not disclose any private personal information so you are able to fill out this questionnaire honestly. Thank you very much

Student: Amy Chiu

Instructor: Prof. Adeline Teo

If you have any questions, contact me. Email: amychiu293@gmail.com

The SNS mentioned in this questionnaire only targets on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

1. Are you currently Taiwanese undergraduate students

Yes (continue finishing this questionnaire)

No (thank you for your time)

**Part I: personal information**

Gender

Male

Female

**Part II- Are you the users of any SNS?**

1. What kind of SNS you are using currently? (Check all that apply.)

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

None of them(skip to Q3)

2. If you are the user of more than 1 kind of SNS mentioned above, please explain the reasons.

3. If you are not the user of any SNS mentioned above, please explain the reasons.

### Part III: Taiwanese undergraduate students' SNS using habit

(If you are not the user of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, you don't need to fill out part 3.)

1. Please number the SNS (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) based on your preference. The number cannot overlap.

(1 for favorite, 2 for second favorite and 3 for least favorite)

	1	2	3
Facebook:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Explain reasons

2. Why do you use SNS? (Check all that apply)

- School work group discussion
- Business need
- Sharing photos
- Sharing words or personal feelings
- Get in touch with old friends and meet new friends
- Chatting room/ instant free message
- Find out what is happen to your friend currently
- Reading breaking news shared by friends
- Reading stuff you are interested in (fanpage)
- Online shopping
- Online game
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How frequently do you check your SNS

- Every 10 minutes
- Every 10-20 minutes
- Every 20-30 minutes
- Every 30-40 minutes
- Every 40-50 minutes
- Every 50-60 minutes
- Every 1-2 hours
- Every 2-3 hours
- Every 3-4 hours
- Every 5-6 hours
- Every 6-7 hours
- Every 7-8 hours
- Every 8-9 hours
- Every 9-10 hours
- Every 10-11 hours

- Once a day
- Twice a day
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

4. How long you spend on SNS each time?

- 10-15 minutes (break time)
- More than 30 minutes
- More than an hour
- More than 2 hours
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

5a. How long can you stop take a break from using SNS? And Why? (e.g. specify the number in minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years)

Example: 5 hours because....

5b. What will happen to your normal life style if you stop using SNS longer than the time stated in 5a. Explain what will happen in details below:

6. How has your life changed after using SNS?

a. In a good way:

b. In a bad way

Part IV: What do you think about SNS?

1a. Do you think using SNS is a beneficial to you? (in any aspect)

- Good
- Bad
- Neutral

1b. Please explain the advantages if there are any.

1c. Please explain the disadvantages if there are any.

Part V: If you are willing to take part in the interview, please leave your contact information.

1a. Name

1b. Email address

1c. Phone numbers (optional)

**Interview Question**

1. Why do you want to use SNS?
2. Why do you want to use other SNSs beside FB?
3. Have you ever complaint by parents and friends because you keep using SNS?
4. What is your hobby before you started to use SNS?
5. Why can SNS replace your original hobby?
6. Have you ever tried to quit SNS?
7. Have you ever closed your SNS account? How did you feel?
8. How does your lifestyle change?
9. How do you think of those who do not use SNS?
10. Have you ever complaint by others because you miss the instant messages?

