

**OVERVIEW ON SOCIAL MEDIA USER BEHAVIOR DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC: FROM FEAR OF MISSING OUT AND SOCIAL NETWORKING
FATIGUE TO PRIVACY CONCERNS**

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Abstract: Social networking sites and social media serve as vital avenues of interaction among people all over the world as well as essential platforms for the distribution of information. Companies, like individuals, embrace social networks as a non-formal way to engage with their customers and suppliers, gather information about their online behavior, and offer personalized content. Both scholars and managers from various organizations looking to increase their competitive edge or market shares have an interest in the impact that social networks have on human behavior. Because of this, the current research seeks to investigate how users perceive a wide range of concepts related to using social networking sites, including fear of missing out (FoMO), social networking fatigue, information and communication overload, ubiquitous connectivity and peer communication, and privacy concerns. The authors also examined users' intentions to continue using social networking sites despite the COVID-19 outbreak in order to ensure a more thorough understanding of the research topic. The findings aim to provide a better knowledge of how users see interaction on social networks in their daily lives as well as an overview of user perspectives on the terms mentioned above.

JEL classification: I00, I12;

Keywords: social media; social networking sites; user perceptions; COVID-19 pandemic

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1. Introduction

Social media has become part of our everyday activities, being present in every moment of people's lives, with a strong impact on their well-being and support for peers (Sitar-Taut et al., 2021). Thus, it reshapes the way we perceive the world and creates an environment where connections and relationships are one click away, at any time, with anyone. As the results show (Musetti et al., 2022), 49% of the world's population used SNS in 2020, a percentage that nearly tripled in the last decade, registering an increase from 970 million users back in 2010 to more than three billion users according to the data available for the year 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social network users felt a much more acute sense of belonging, socializing, and keeping abreast of news, information, or posts created or shared by virtual friends (Islam et al., 2020). At the same time, SNS facilitates quick access to shared information and communication with other users, and communication with friends, colleagues, family, or others has become much simpler and more accessible during lockdown periods when a face-to-face meeting would have been difficult to establish.

SNS is a substrate for social media that enables the exchange of content generated by users on the Internet so that they can connect to a public social networking network (Pilatti et al., 2021). Among the most well-known and used types of SNS are Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, and Twitter. People can connect to social networks for fun, to create new connections with other users with whom they share the same ideas, hobbies, or beliefs, respectively, to restore or maintain relationships with friends, family, or colleagues, to fill free time, or wanting to find news and information (Musetti et al., 2022). Fear of missing out (FoMO) is a concept that has captured the attention of researchers in recent years, due to the ambiguity associated with it, especially in terms of the generated negative effects (Li et al., 2022). Thus, FoMO is associated with the black side of social networks and the online environment (Sun et al., 2021) due to the negative implications it has on the user's well-being. Therefore, researchers in the field (Fioravanti et al., 2021) have shown great interest in evaluating whether FoMO levels of individuals lead not only to the level of involvement in SNS, but also to develop a compulsive use of them. However, there is little evidence on how FoMO affects the psychological response of each individual who uses social media online, which is an important gap in the field, especially in light of the fact that social media dominates the online environment and is constantly developing, and the number of users has increased exponentially (Tandon et al., 2021). Furthermore, some studies agree that FoMO is correlated with excessive use of SNS and, with the current advancement in the industry of smart mobile devices, online social activities transform into accessible and convenient tools used by individuals to connect each other (Li et al., 2022). At the same time, users' concerns increase knowing that SNS providers can monitor their actions, especially with the help of location-based services, allowing SNS providers to identify their position in real-time and share this information with other users. (Gao et al., 2018).

Recognizing the existing literature gap in the field, the design of the current research focuses on the analysis of how social networks influence user behavior in real life, emphasising also the effects they have on individuals in terms of the time spent by users in the online social environment. Concepts such as fear of missing

out (FoMO), SNS fatigue, information overload, communication overload, ubiquitous connectivity, and peer communication also constituted topics of research. Furthermore, we investigated issues such as personal data confidentiality, and the collection of personal data for inappropriate purposes, consciously or unconsciously provided by the user. Nevertheless, we also focused on the desire of users to find alternatives to SNS or to continue using them. Taking all these points into consideration, the obtained results reflect an overview of how social networks affect lifestyle, the need for communication or different attitudes, and provide a more in-depth understanding of how users perceive them.

2. Literature review

Social networking sites (SNS) constitute a vital component of our daily activity (Mican et al., 2020), as they allow users to communicate and socialize with friends, family, or colleagues much faster and more easily compared to a face-to-face connection. Unlike the real world, in the online environment, the user can create connections at any time, with individuals from anywhere while using a social network such as Facebook (Zafar et al., 2021). Simultaneously, social media platforms have begun to provide consumers with many opportunities to compare products, features, and suppliers (Mican and Sitar-Taut, 2020). In addition, allows consumer-to-consumer interaction by sharing consumer experiences through digital formats such as videos, photos, comments, text posts, etc. (Onofrei et al., 2022). Therefore, when individual experiences, ideas, and attitudes are shared, consumers transform themselves into co-creators of content/value in terms of learning, collecting, and distributing information, and these activities determine a certain amount of time spent online.

SNSs are web-based services built around three key features (Musetti et al., 2022). The first one refers to the creation of a personal account in a social network, public or semi-public, by providing self-descriptive information of the user, followed by his list of connections, respectively, his interactions with other users. A good example in this sense is the list of personal virtual friends displayed to each user on the Facebook platform, later called Meta. In the latter phase, most SNSs are organized to provide frequent content to users, which makes it easier to use social media as often as possible to check for new content, such as friend posts, incoming messages, or shared photos (Cheung et al., 2022). The use of social networks has indirect positive effects on the user's well-being by increasing self-esteem and perceived social support, as well as by providing opportunities for self-disclosure with positive social repercussions, such as greater social support (Pilatti et al., 2021).

Fear of missing out (FoMO) refers to an individual's fear and concern about the lack of certain information or experiences from a social point of view that he or she wishes to receive and that brings him or her satisfaction (Tandon et al., 2021). The concept of FoMO is also described as a form of anxiety-related psychopathology whose cause is perceived deficits in psychosocial needs, for example, the stringent need to belong or social relationships (Berezan et al., 2020). FoMO triggers the fear of not being left out, respectively, of not losing satisfying experiences that other users may live during an absence from their social environment (Li et al., 2022). Thus, FoMO can create a distinct tension that affects an individual's internal state, respectively, induces a desire that causes him to stay in touch and interact more and more with social networks, so that he/she is aware

of the information shared continuously by the contacts he or she has in social networks (Fioravanti et al., 2021).

From the analysis of the structure and environmental characteristics of SNS, we may conclude that communication through SNS develops online, being an excellent alternative for those who are confronted with anxiety. As research in the field (Hussain and Wegmann, 2021) emphasized, people experiencing high levels associated with anxiety appreciate that communicating in an online environment is much less intimidating than communicating face-to-face. In the current study, the user's perception was analyzed on the aspects related to the fatigue felt after using SNS, as well as on information overload by asking specific questions to which they answered through a notation to highlight how often they use social networks.

Ubiquitous connectivity is a significant modern innovation that transforms the way companies connect and interact with consumers, respectively, the way they collect data about their purchases and preferences (Margulis et al., 2020). Ubiquitous connectivity implies that users can access the SNS regardless of time or location, by constantly connecting with others (Choi, 2016; Gao et al., 2018), and users' personal information, such as photos, interests, group of friends, and family, is exposed to others. They are frequently asked to disclose certain personal information when creating an account on the SNS. This raises concerns about leaking private information, as people become increasingly skeptical about disclosing personal information to strangers because of their consistent fear that private information will be misused (Zhou, 2020). Privacy is associated with access to personal information in the online environment, which encourages the user to protect their personal information from being misused. Analyzing the downside of ubiquitous connectivity and its effects on individuals using SNS, our study also focuses on individuals' concerns about online privacy because ubiquitous connectivity contributes to the development of social presence (Choi, 2016). Moreover, it also brings to our attention the issue of user privacy, especially because by using the SNS, individuals are prone to disclosing private information to establish connections and build relationships (Jung, 2017). In addition to users' preoccupation with the possibility of leaking personal information online, ubiquitous connectivity also highlights the issue of overloading information from the online social environment (Gao et al., 2018). In line with these aspects, this study assumes that ubiquitous connectivity due to SNS inevitably leads to concerns about privacy and therefore may have negative outcomes for individuals (Choi, 2016).

Since SNS allows users a constant exchange of content and access to information disclosed by other users such as posts, messages, comments, or photos, a possible consequence of using SNS is the constant threat of information leakage. As a result, ubiquitous connectivity could lead to concerns about privacy and personal data collection considering the SNS. Therefore, during the use of the SNS, users usually reveal vulnerable personal information, such as personal or unconsciously shared profile information, information about their current location, or private conversations with friends, family, colleagues, or other users with whom they have connections. Because of that, the service provider can follow the activities and evidence of users with the help of advanced technological instruments. These mentioned aspects may raise users' concerns about their privacy (Gao et al., 2018).

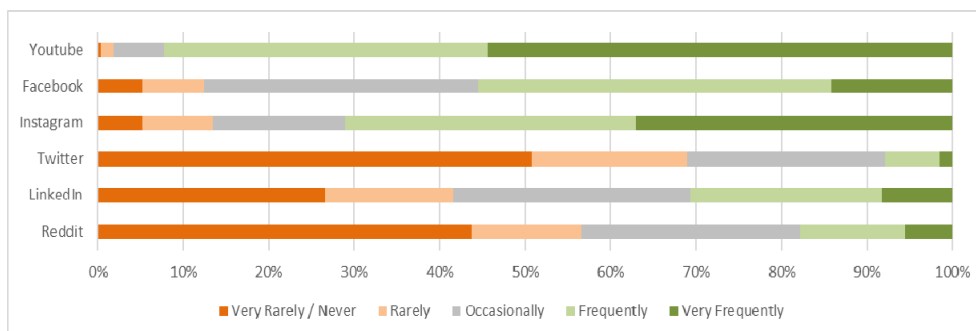
Trust is associated with people's faith in each other and consists of the sincerity shown towards the one next to them, consistency in the good behavior

towards them, and the observance of the promises made. SNSs are strongly grounded in interpersonal relationships, as people who tend to trust these platforms continue to use them frequently, influencing their interactive behavior (Zafar et al., 2021). The primary role of trust in social networks is described by different levels of perception among users, suggesting that trust in the SNS may cause the response of social network users to the information they find during use and navigation (Hussain and Wegmann, 2021; Zafar et al., 2021). Individuals' perceptions of trust in social networks can attract and keep users' attention to posts, comments, or videos shared through certain social channels or existing profiles/accounts on the network used (Li et al., 2011). Therefore, browsing social networks and the influence they have on their use on individuals depends on their trust in the SNS and will be more substantial for those who have a stronger trust in social networks than for those who show a certain degree of skepticism or distrust of them (Cao et al., 2021).

3. Data analysis and results

The authors used descriptive statistics for data analysis, as well as for describing the basic characteristics of the sample. Data were collected through Google Forms from 544 students, using five-point Likert scales to measure respondents' agreement with various statements. The sample consisted of women (57.90%) and men (42.10%) aged 19-24 years (82.17%) and aged over 25 years (17.83%). In the followings, there are summaries of the sample and measurements, and quantitative analysis of the data was performed together with the graphical analysis.

Figure 1: The main social networks used

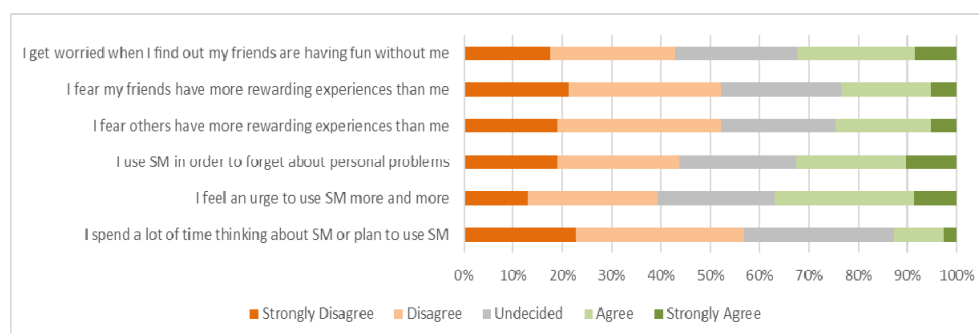


In Figure 1 we can see the distribution of the frequency with which the main social networks are used by the respondents to the questionnaire. Of these, 54.41% use Youtube very frequently as a social media network, 37.13% use Instagram very frequently, and 41.36% frequently use Facebook to socialize. Only 5.15% rarely use Facebook and Instagram, and some of the answers highlighted the fact that 50.74% rarely use Twitter to socialize, 43.75% rarely use Reddit as an online social platform, and 26.65% use it very rarely LinkedIn. Thus, we can conclude that the most frequently and very frequently used social networks are

Youtube (92.3%), Instagram (71.1%), and Facebook (55.5%), and the least used, rarely and very rarely, are Twitter (68.9%), Reddit (56.6%) and LinkedIn (41.5%).

In our study, as highlighted in Figure 2, the analysis of the responses shows that regarding the measurement of fear of missing out, a percentage (32.4%) of respondents are worried to know that their friends are having fun without them, and instead (42.8%) do not have a problem with this aspect. A percentage of (23.5%) fear that their friends have more satisfying experiences than them, but (52.0%) do not agree with this, and the percentages are similar in terms of the experiences of other people on social networks. Regarding the compulsive use of SNS, a percentage of (32.5%) use social media (SM) to forget about personal problems, and (36.9%) feel the need to use more SM. Only (12.9%) agree that they spend a lot of time thinking about SM, while (56.8%) consider that they do not spend much time thinking about SM.

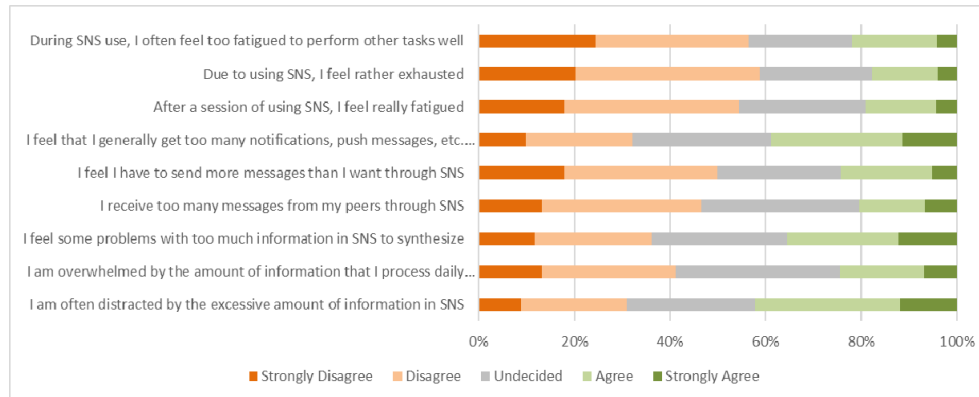
Figure 2: Fear of missing out and compulsive use of SNS



Regarding SNS fatigue, Figure 3 shows that a part of respondents, more precisely a percentage of (22.1%) claim that while using SNS they often feel too fatigued to perform other tasks well, but (56.4%) opine that the use of SNS does not tire them and that they can perform other tasks without problems. A percentage of (17.8%) consider that due to the use of SNS, they feel exhausted, but (58.6%) consider that they still have energy. After a session of using the SNS, a percentage of (19.1%) consider that they feel quite tired, but a significant percentage (54.4%) believe that using the SNS does not tire them. Regarding communication overload, out of the total respondents, (38.8%) consider receiving too many notifications and push messages from SNS, and (32.2%) do not agree with this. A percentage (24.3%) of the respondents consider that they sent more messages than they wanted through SNS, instead (50%) do not agree with this. In the same vein, a percentage of (20.4%) consider receiving too many messages from peers through SNS, and (46.5%) consider that they are not too many.

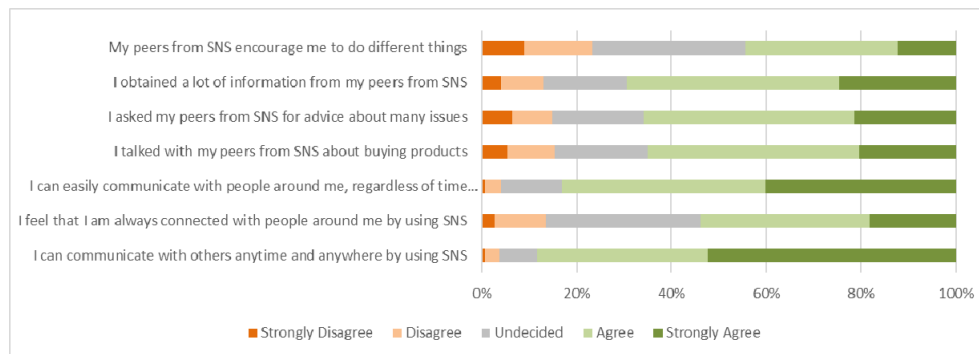
In the case of information overload, 35.5% of respondents experience some problems with too much information to be synthesized within the SNS, but instead, 36.2% of respondents feel comfortable. Regarding the fact that they feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they must process daily within the SNS, (24.4%) agree with this, and (41.2%) do not have a problem in this direction. A percentage of (42.1%) of respondents say that they are often distracted by the excessive amount of information in the SNS, but (30.9%) do not consider it a problem.

Figure 3: SNS fatigue, communication, and information overload



Regarding peer communication, Figure 4 shows that (44.3%) of the respondents consider that their colleagues within the SNS encourage them to do different activities, but instead (23.2%) do not agree with this perspective. However, most of the respondents (69.5%) considered that they had obtained a lot of information from colleagues within the SNS, and only (12.9%) did not agree. A significant percentage (66.0%) stated that they asked their colleagues from SNS for advice on a wide range of issues, and only (14.9%) did not ask for advice. Another high percentage (65.1%) stated that they talked to their colleagues from SNS about buying various products, and (15.4%) did not have such discussions on SNS.

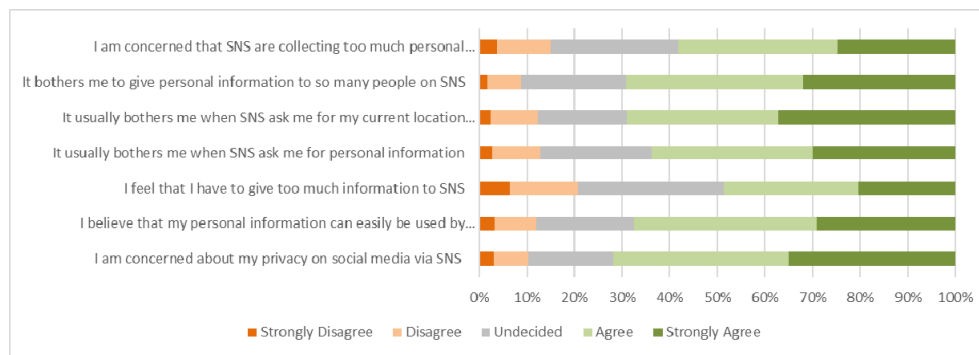
Figure 4: Peer communication and ubiquitous connectivity through SNS



Another important concept in terms of SNS is ubiquitous connectivity. In this sense, the majority of the respondents (83.1%) believe that through the SNS they can easily communicate with the people around them, at any moment and from any location. More than half of the respondents (53.9%) feel that they are always connected with the people around them using SNS. A high percentage of respondents (88.4%) believe that SNSs have a major advantage because through them they can communicate with others anytime and anywhere.

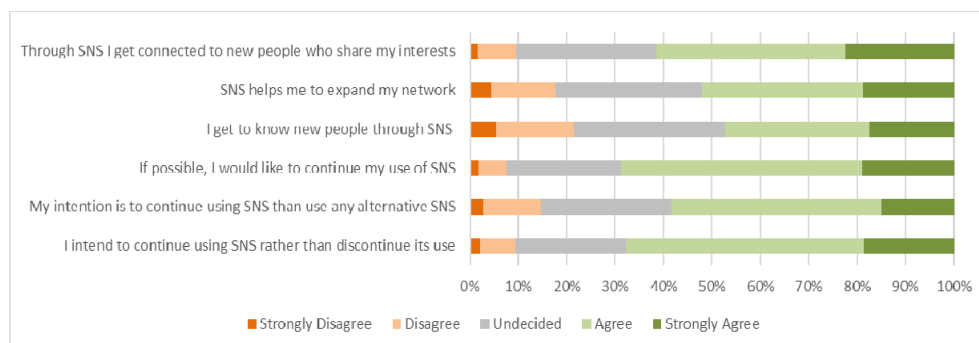
A frequently discussed issue lately is that of data collection and concerns regarding SNS. In this regard, as can be seen from Figure 5, more than half of the respondents (58.3%) are concerned that the SNS collects too much personal information about them, but instead (14.9%) do not have a problem with this. A significant percentage (69.3%) consider that they feel bothered to provide personal information to so many people within the SNS, but (8.8%) feel comfortable with this. Also, (69.1%) consider that they are disturbed that within the SNS they are asked for information about their current location, but (12.3%) do not feel affected. A percentage of (63.8%) are annoyed that too much personal information is requested within the SNS, but (12.9%) are not worried.

Figure 5: Data collection and privacy invasion/concerns regarding SNS



Regarding privacy invasion/concerns regarding SNS, almost half of the respondents (48.7%) feel that they must give too much information within SNS, but (20.6%) consider that it is not so much. Another concern is that (67.5%) believe that personal information can be used too easily by marketers on the SNS, but (11.9%) do not agree with this. A significant percentage of respondents (71.9%) are concerned about their privacy on social networks, but (10.1%) feel comfortable and do not experience feelings of concern.

Figure 6: New relationship building and intention to continue using the SNS



The respondents of the study consider that an important aspect within the SNS is represented by the new relationship building using the SNS. Thus, according to the data in Figure 6, the majority of respondents (61.6%) consider that through the SNS they connect with new people who share their interests, (52.0%) consider that the SNS helps them to expand their network of contacts, and (47.2%) believe that the SNS helps them meet new people.

Regarding the intention to continue using the SNS, more than half (58.5%) stated that they intend to continue using the SNS, rather than using other alternatives to the current SNS. Only (14.7%) would prefer other alternatives to the current SNS. Regarding the continued use of the SNS, (67.8%) wish, if possible, to continue using the SNS rather than discontinue its use. However, a percentage (9.4%) say that they no longer want to continue using the current SNS.

4. Conclusions

Social media and SNS have become extremely popular and are part of our everyday life taking into consideration that they facilitate quick access to information and communication with other users. Thus, communicating with friends, colleagues, family, or others has become easier and more accessible. Therefore, our study made an overview of the use of social media and SNS during the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania and addressed several concepts studied intensively in the literature.

The results obtained show that the most popular social networks used daily are Youtube, Instagram, and Facebook, and the top of the least used is led by Twitter, followed by Reddit and LinkedIn. Regarding the concept of fear of missing out (FoMO), only a small part of the respondents is worried about the fact that their friends are having fun without them, or that their friends, respectively, other people, have more satisfying experiences than them. On the contrary, almost half of the respondents do not have a problem with these aspects. Regarding compulsive use of the SNS, approximately one-third of respondents use SM to forget about personal issues and feel the need to use SM and SNS more frequently.

Regarding SNS fatigue, more than half of the respondents believe that using SNS does not tire them and that they can perform other tasks without problems. About the same percentage consider that they do not feel exhausted due to the use of SNS, or after an extended session of using SNS. Regarding the communication overload, out of the total respondents, only around one-third of the respondents consider that they receive too many notifications and push messages from SNS, and about half consider that they did not send more messages than they wanted through SNS, nor that they receive too many messages from peers through SNS. In the case of information overload, most of the respondents say that they do face severe challenges in terms of too much data to be synthesized in the SNS and that they do not feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they have to process daily in the SNS. However, a considerable percentage of the respondents agree that they often feel distracted by the existing information overload of the SNS.

Regarding peer communication, most respondents believe that their colleagues in the SNS encourage them to do different activities, that they have obtained a lot of information from them, that they have asked them for advice on

different problems, or that they have had discussions about buying various products. In the case of ubiquitous connectivity, most of the respondents believe that they can easily communicate through the SNS, that they feel that they are always connected to the people around them and that they have a major advantage because they can communicate with others anytime from anywhere.

Another issue studied was data collection and privacy concerns regarding SNS. Thus, more than half of the respondents are concerned that the SNS collects too much personal information or are disturbed that the SNS asks them for information about their current location. Nearly half of the respondents feel that they must provide too much information in the SNS, and the majority believe that personal information can be used too easily by the sellers of certain goods, which makes them worried about their privacy on social media. A high percentage of respondents believe that the SNS brings a major advantage because by using SNS they connect with new people who share similar interests, therefore expanding their network of contacts and meeting new people. A particularly important aspect of the study is the analysis of the intention to continue using the SNS. Thus, almost two-thirds of the respondents stated that their intention is to continue using the SNS and that they would not prefer other alternatives to the current SNS.

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