

Research Article

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**An investigation of students' ability to understand digital article
on social platforms**

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Abstract

This research aimed to evaluate how students' digital literacy level affect their ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms and investigate the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms. Specifically, it seeks to explore digital literacy, cognitive processing, linguistic comprehension, and social media dynamics interact to affect students' ability to interpret and evaluate digital article critically. This research was conducted using a descriptive quantitative research method. The subjects of this research were students of English Education Department. The research instruments used to collect data were questionnaires to investigate the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms and tests to evaluate how does students' digital literacy level affect their ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms. The sampling method used in this study is the total sampling method. The result of the research indicated that the ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms of English Education Students ranged from good to very poor, with the majority falling into the fair to poor category (17,983). Meanwhile, the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms were attributed to several factors. First, students were not accustomed to read digital articles on social platforms. Second, they struggled with numerous unfamiliar words and sentence structures, particularly in digital article on social platforms texts.

Keywords: Articles; Digital; Platform; Ability; Difficulties

1. Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has greatly transformed the manner in which people access and acquire information. One of the most dominant media for information dissemination today is digital social platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and TikTok. Articles or writings published on these social platforms provide a fast, easily accessible, and interactive

source of information for users, including students. Keeping up with the pace of technological development is nearly impossible, as advancements occur in many areas such as transportation, gadgets, tools, and more. Every day, things in this world change rapidly due to the speed of technology. Gadgets themselves are one of the products of this progress, as we can see from the fact that people of all ages and backgrounds from teenagers to adults commonly use them.

For students, the ability to understand digital articles on social platforms is a crucial skill. This is because most of the information they consume is no longer in formal academic texts, but rather short articles, news summaries, or public opinion pieces disseminated online. However, not all students are able to interpret the content of these articles effectively, particularly in distinguishing fact from opinion, recognizing bias, and understanding the context of the information presented.

We cannot ignore the presence of gadgets in our daily lives. For some people, gadgets have even become a part of their lifestyle, as their influence on daily activities is significant. This can be seen in how easily individuals can access information and communicate with others through their smartphones. Social media, in particular, is one of the most impactful aspects of gadget use.

Reading has become a fading activity nowadays. Students, who are supposed to read more books to gain knowledge, are beginning to neglect this responsibility. They tend to be more interested in using gadgets and spending time on social media, even though they still understand the importance of reading. However, some individuals have found a way to take advantage of technological developments and the presence of social media by bringing their reading activities into these platforms. After all, social media can also provide a wide range of information that people seek.

Social media serves as a limitless source of information, allowing people to access whatever they want to know. Human nature, with its constant desire to stay updated and entertained, is what keeps social media thriving. However, because of this unlimited access, users need to be wise in how they use it, since both positive and negative things can happen on these platforms. Therefore, it is important to filter and manage our activities on social media. Using Social media as a tool for reading is far more beneficial than simply using it for less meaningful activities, such as updating status or similar things. What matters is that we filter the content and choose valuable materials to read, like digital articles on social platforms. Those who keep up with the news on social media still maintain their reading habits, as they make an effort to read articles regularly.

This phenomenon raises questions about the extent to which students are able to comprehend digital articles on social media. By understanding students' abilities, educators can design more effective learning strategies to improve digital literacy and critical thinking skills.

Based on this background, this study was conducted with the aim of analyzing students' abilities in understanding digital articles on social platforms, as well as describing the difficulties they face in the process of understanding it.

Putra and Abdullah (2020) found that Research in Indonesian and Asian contexts shows that while students frequently read on social media, comprehension levels remain low if reading is not accompanied by critical analysis. This study has the same scope as the research currently being conducted, namely regarding reading skills on social media. However, the researcher will focus on the abilities of English language education students within the specific scope mentioned.

Delgado et al. (2018) found that students often obtained lower comprehension scores when reading digital texts compared to printed texts. This was due to skimming habits and a lack of focus in digital environments. This study and the research conducted by the researcher have similarities

in analyzing reading for students. However, in this study, the researcher focused on reading on social media as a reading medium.

1.1 Concept of Understanding

McTighe and Wiggins (revised edition 2021) emphasizes understanding as transfer: students are considered to understand if they are able to explain, interpret, apply, have perspective, empathy, and self-awareness. In essence, sentence comprehension means recognizing the writer's intended message. Achieving this understanding goes beyond simply reading; it requires reflection, evaluation, and verification of the message until its meaning is clear.

Many individuals may be able to read news fluently with proper intonation and clear voice, yet fail to grasp its meaning. True comprehension requires the reader to understand the content in order to capture the information the writer intends to convey.

Students' understanding refers to their comprehension of a given text. They are expected to grasp not only the literal meaning but also the intended message conveyed by the writer. Simply translating the text without recognizing its structured meaning and message cannot be considered true understanding.

In comprehending an article, students must grasp both the meaning of the article and the message intended by the writer. Merely translating the sentences does not lead to full understanding, as they may still fail to recognize the actual structure of the article.

Evaluating comprehension through the retelling method is considered highly effective. McKenna et al. (2015:206) state that "Retelling demonstrates consequential validity, which means that the examinee experiences positive outcomes as a result of retelling." In contrast to simple translation, retelling demands that students thoroughly grasp the meaning of a text so they can convey it using their own words. When learners can restate the content in their own language, maintaining the proper order and including all essential points, it indicates a true understanding of the material.

1.2 Concept of Reading

Bezemer and Kress (2016) point out that digital communication is intrinsically multimodal, so that meaning is formed through the interconnectedness of various modes. Jewitt (2017) emphasizes the need for multimodal literacy to read complex digital messages. Rowsell and Walsh (2015) and Serafini (2014) also emphasize the importance of a multimodal literacy framework to understand the combination of text, visuals, audio, and interactivity in social media. Furthermore, Leu et al. (2017) add that new literacies require readers to be able to navigate text, visuals, hyperlinks, and social interactions simultaneously in order to fully interpret messages in the digital space.

Reading comprehension can be categorized into three types. Literal comprehension refers to the ability to understand the exact meaning or information that the author directly presents in the text. In this stage, readers are expected to understand ideas and information that are clearly expressed in the text. This includes skills such as recognizing and remembering facts, identifying main ideas and supporting details, classifying information, making outlines, using context clues to

determine meaning, following given instructions and sequences, identifying stated conclusions, as well as recognizing explicit relationships and organizational structures in the passage.

Inferential comprehension relates to understanding the implied meaning behind the author's words. At this level, readers are expected to read between the lines and draw conclusions about information that is not directly stated. These inferences may include recognizing the main idea, identifying supporting details, understanding the sequence of events, and determining cause-and-effect relationships. It can also include interpreting figurative language, making predictions, drawing conclusions, recognizing the mood of the text, and evaluating the author's perspective.

Critical comprehension focuses on understanding the reasons behind the author's statements. This advanced level of comprehension requires readers to apply external criteria based on their own experiences in order to evaluate the quality of the text, the values it conveys, as well as the author's reasoning, simplifications, and generalizations. At this stage, readers engage with the material both intellectually and emotionally.

1.3 Concept of Social Platform

Ihabash & Ma (2017) – emphasize that social media functions as a space for entertainment, information, interaction, and identity, all of which influence how students understand digital content. It shows that The reading experience in digital media is heavily influenced by social and interactive contexts. Sundar et al. (2015) also emphasized that the effects of interactive media stem not only from the message, but also from the design and features of the platform itself (Theory of Interactive Media Effects).

Carr & Hayes (2015) – provides a broader definition, emphasizing that social media is a digital-based communication system that facilitates interaction, collaboration, and content sharing among users in a network. Appel et al. (2020) – discusses how social media has evolved into a digital psychology arena, with significant impacts on identity, social relations, information consumption, and even economic behavior. This theory gives us an idea of how influential social media is in our lives.

Social platforms can be categorized according to its main function, form of interaction, and purpose of use. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) said that social media as an interactive platform that influences how students consume and understand digital articles. This theory shows that media as an interesting platform to consume, it is not only about the content, but also how the content is packaged, presented, and experienced by the audience.

2. Methods

The research method plays a vital role in guaranteeing the accuracy and effectiveness of a study. This part outlines in detail the research design, the population and sample, the data collection techniques and instruments, the methods of data analysis, as well as other procedures related to the execution of this research.

2.1 Research Design

In this study, the researcher applies a descriptive-quantitative approach in line with the objective of identifying students' digital literacy level affect their ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms and investigate the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms. The research is also considered qualitative since the findings are presented and interpreted in the form of descriptive sentences.

2.2 Research Participants or Population and Sample

The participants of this study were students of the English Education Department at the Islamic University of Makassar. The population consisted of English Education Students from Islamic University of Makassar at the first, third, fifth and seventh semesters, involving four classes with a total of approximately 62 students.

The sampling technique applied in this research was total sampling, in which the entire population was taken as the sample. This method was chosen because the population number was relatively small and manageable allowing all members to be included in the study.

Table 1. Research Participants

No	Name Class	Participant		Percentage
		Population	Sample	
1.	Class A	9	9	14.51
2.	Class B	16	16	25.80
3.	Class C	12	12	19.35
4.	Class D	25	25	40.32
TOTAL		62	62	100

2.3 Instruments

In this research, the instruments employed were a test and a questionnaire. The test was administered to measure students' digital literacy level affect their ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms, while the questionnaire was designed to identify the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding such articles. The test and questionnaire instruments were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation to determine item validity, where an item is considered valid if the $r_{\text{calculated}} > r_{\text{table}}$. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient value of 0.70 or higher indicating good internal consistency and that the instrument is reliable.

1. Test

The procedure for administering the test was designed to measure students' comprehension and interpretation skills through a retelling activity using authentic digital articles taken from social platforms. The retelling system allows the researcher to assess not

only how well students understand the content of the article but also how effectively they can reconstruct and communicate the main ideas in their own words. Brown (2004) This retelling-based procedure effectively measures students' deep comprehension of digital articles by requiring them to reconstruct meaning, not just recall information. It provides both quantitative data (scores) and qualitative insights (content analysis), making it a robust approach for analyzing students' digital reading ability.

The validity and reliability test results indicate that the test instrument has very high reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.98, well above the minimum limit of 0.70. This indicates that the test items have excellent internal consistency and are able to measure the same construct stably. Therefore, this instrument can be declared reliable and valid for use in measuring digital article retelling skills, as the measurement results tend to be consistent and reliable.

2. Questionnaire

To investigate the factors contributing to students' difficulties, a questionnaire consisting of 10 items based on three indicators access, habit, and sentence. Based on the results of the validity and reliability test analysis of the questionnaire data consisting of 10 items and 62 respondents, the correlation value (r_{count}) for each item ranged from 0.493 to 0.637, all of which were greater than the r_{table} of 0.250. This indicates that all questions in the instrument were declared valid because they had a significant relationship with the total score. In addition, the results of the reliability test showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.913, which means the level of internal consistency of the instrument is very high. Thus, this questionnaire can be concluded as valid and reliable, and is suitable for use as a consistent measuring tool for collecting research data.

2.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the test result, the students' work was scored in order to obtain information about each individual's performance. To determine their scores, the researcher applied analytical scoring scale. The scoring method allowed for a valid assessment of how accurately and completely students could reconstruct and communicate the digital article's meaning.

Table 2. Analytical scale to measure content

Score	Criteria
30-27	Excellent to very good: Knowledgeable; substantive; Through; development of thesis; relevant to assigned topic.
26-22	Good to average: Some knowledge of subject; adequate range; limited development of thesis; mostly relevant to topic; but lack detail.
21-17	Fair to poor:

16-13	Limited knowledge of subject; little substance; inadequate development of topic.
	Very poor: Does not show knowledge of subject; non substantive; not pertinent.

The researcher employed a Likert Scale as the response option for each item in the questionnaire. After administering the completed questionnaires, the researcher calculated the total responses for each category within every aspect. The data collected from the questionnaires then analyzed using the percentage technique.

Table 3. Likert Scale

No	Items	Score
1	Strongly Agree	5
2	Agree	4
3	Partially Agree	3
4	Disagree	2
5	Strong disagree	1

3. Results

The findings include data on students' digital literacy level affect their ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms and investigate the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms. This study was carried out English Education Students of the Islamic University of Makassar. The researcher involved all classes from this department, totaling four classes and included all students as the sample. The collected data are presented in detail in the following explanation.

- a) Evaluate the students' digital literacy level affect their ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms.

Out of 62 students, none of the students (0%) achieved the "excellent to very good" category. A total of 7 students (11.29%) were categorized as "good to average" category, 36 students (58,06%) as "fair to poor," and 19 students (30,64%) as "very poor" category. These results indicate that students' ability to understand digital articles on social platforms ranged from good to very poor, with the majority falling into the fair to poor category.

Table 4. Students' Ability Classification

Score	Category	Students
30-27	Excellent to very good:	0
26-22	Good to average:	7

21-17	Fair to poor:	36
16-13	Very poor:	19

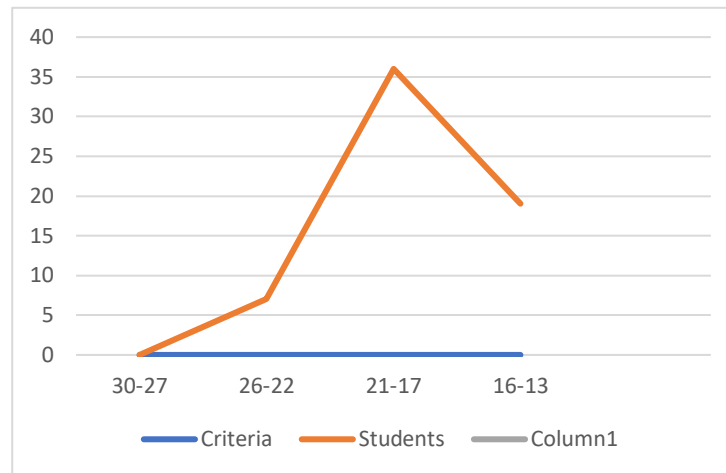


Figure 1. Students' Ability Classification

Out of 62 students, the total test score amounted to 1115 with a total of 62 data entries and it was found that the mean score of the test was 17,983. The data shows that the average ability of students in understanding digital articles can be categorized as fair to poor. The data indicates that although students are familiar with digital platforms, their comprehension skills in online contexts remain underdeveloped. Ng, W. (2012) explains that many "digital natives" are only familiar with technology because they use it frequently, but are not necessarily digitally literate; they may be adept at accessing social media but less able to evaluate the credibility of information or use technology for critical learning. It shows that the ability to navigate platforms does not guarantee the ability to critically understand and evaluate digital content.

b) Analyze factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms

1. Access

The access indicator consisted of statements identifying the causes of students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms. This indicator was represented by two items, namely item 1 and item 2. It was found that the gap between students who chose "agree" and those who chose "disagree" was significant, as all students selected "agree" and none chose "disagree." This indicates that access was not a factor contributing to students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms.

2. Habit

The habit indicator consisted of statements identifying the factors causing students' difficulties in understanding digital articles on social platforms from the habit aspect. This indicator was represented by four items, namely items 3, 4, 5 and 6. Based on the students' habits toward digital articles, it was found that although they were active users of social media platforms, they had not accustomed themselves to engaging with digital articles. As a result, they were not familiar with reading such articles. Their unfamiliarity with the vocabulary and sentence structures commonly used in digital articles made it difficult for them to comprehend the content, since they had not developed sufficient exposure to the language style. It can be concluded that students' reading habits were among the factors contributing to the difficulties they experienced in understanding digital articles.

3. Sentence

The sentence indicators included statements that might explain the difficulties students encounter in understanding sentences in digital articles. This indicator consisted of four items, specifically items 7, 8, 9 and 10. The findings based on students' reading habits show that they still had trouble understanding digital. This difficulty occurred because digital articles often contained unfamiliar words, vocabulary, and sentence structures, making it hard for students to catch the message and the main idea of the digital article. In conclusion, some of the challenges students faced in reading digital articles were linked to sentence structure.

The findings reveal that students face significant difficulties in understanding digital articles due to limited practice and insufficient exposure to authentic online texts. Their lack of experience in digital reading prevents them from developing the strategies needed to interpret multimodal and nonlinear information effectively. Additionally, unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures increase cognitive load, making comprehension even more challenging. These factors collectively hinder students' ability to read critically and evaluate online information accurately. Therefore, integrating regular digital reading practice and explicit vocabulary instruction into classroom activities is essential to improve students' comprehension of digital articles on social platforms.

4. Discussion

The test results showed that the students' mean score was 17.983, indicating that the English Education Students at the Islamic University of Makassar had a Fair to Poor ability to critically understand and retell digital articles shared on social media platforms. The questionnaire results further revealed several factors causing difficulties in comprehending digital articles, which were consistent with the findings from both the test and the questionnaires. This result was support with the research result of Nation (2001) "Sentence comprehension is highly dependent on vocabulary mastery. Digital articles containing unfamiliar academic words/terms will make it difficult for students to understand sentence structure." This indicates that digital article on social platforms

employs its own structure. This theory supports the research findings that the unfamiliar structure of digital article is one of the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding it.

There was research that support this result, Delgado et al. (2018) found, through a meta-analysis, that reading comprehension from digital screens is lower than from printed text, especially for long and complex texts. Similarly, Clinton (2019) asserted that digital reading tends to reduce deep cognitive engagement due to multitasking and skimming habits. Thus, the two theories complement each other: Delgado et al. (2018) highlight empirical findings showing a decline in digital reading comprehension, while Clinton (2019) explains the psychological and behavioral mechanisms that contribute to this phenomenon. Both support the view that, although digital reading is becoming more common, digital literacy does not automatically guarantee a deep understanding of texts.

5. Conclusions

From the findings and discussion, it can be inferred that the participants of this study expressed a positive perception toward students' ability to critically comprehend and retell digital articles shared on social media. However, based on the results obtained from tests and questionnaires, the actual performance of English Education students at the Islamic University of Makassar in critically understanding and retelling such digital articles was categorized as fair to poor. The mean score of 17.983 reveals that students' understanding of digital articles is moderate at best and needs significant improvement. The difficulties experienced by English Education students at the Islamic University of Makassar in understanding digital articles on social platforms were influenced by several factors. First, the students lacked practice in reading digital articles. Second, they encountered numerous unfamiliar words and sentence structures commonly used in digital articles. The analysis demonstrates that students' struggles are not merely technical but also linguistic and cognitive.

Thus, this study concludes that although students have positive attitudes toward digital based reading, their ability to understand and critically interpret digital texts remains limited. Improvements are needed in the form of critical digital reading training, expanding academic vocabulary, and familiarizing themselves with reading complex texts from various digital sources to continuously improve students' digital literacy and critical thinking skills.

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Appendices



Figure 1. The Data Collection Process

TEST INSTRUMENT

Instructions for Students

Please read the following instructions carefully:

1. Read the digital article below carefully.
2. You are not allowed to translate the text or use online dictionaries during reading.
3. After reading, retell the content of the article **in your own words** paragraph.
4. Your retelling should include:
 - a. The **main idea** of the article
 - b. **Important details** or supporting information
 - c. The **writer's conclusion or message**
 - d. Your own short **interpretation or opinion** about the article (optional)
5. You have **15 minutes** to complete your retelling.

“The Impact of Social Media on Students’ Reading Habits” (Adapted from an educational blog shared on Medium.com)

In today’s digital era, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have changed the way students read and process information. Many students now prefer short posts, captions, or visual stories instead of reading long articles or books. While this trend makes reading faster and more accessible, it also reduces students’ attention span and their ability to analyze information critically.

According to recent studies, students who spend more time on social media often struggle to focus on long texts, especially academic materials. Educators suggest that balancing digital media use and traditional reading is essential to maintain strong comprehension skills. By developing critical reading habits, students can learn to filter misinformation and improve their academic performance.

“How Artificial Intelligence Is Changing the Way We Learn” (Adapted from an educational blog shared on LinkedIn and The Conversation)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the education sector. Many schools and universities now use AI-powered tools to personalize learning experiences for students. For example, some language learning apps can identify a learner’s weaknesses and automatically design exercises to help them improve.

However, experts warn that excessive reliance on AI tools might reduce students’ creativity and critical thinking. If students depend too much on automated systems, they might lose the ability to think independently. Therefore, teachers play an important role in balancing the use of technology and traditional learning methods. AI should be seen as a *supporting tool*, not a replacement for human interaction and creativity in education.

QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT

A. Respondent Identity

Name : ANNISA SYAHBA
Class/Semester : I
Campus : UNIVERSITAS ISLAM MAKASSAR

B. Questionnaire Completion Instructions

1. Put a *checklist* mark on the answer that you think is most appropriate.
2. Each question only requires one answer.
3. Please answer the following questions according to your own opinion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Everyone have gadget		✓			
2.	Everyone have social media		✓			

has

has

2. Habit

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3.	People follow so many account on social media	✓				
4.	Mostly people follow Digital Article account		✓			
5.	I follow one or more digital article accounts		✓			
6.	I read digital article more than 2 times a day			✓		

3. Sentence

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7.	Easy to know what the writer means in digital article					✓
8.	It is easy to get the meassage of the digital article					✓
9.	Digital article use unfamiliar structure	✓				
10.	Digital article use unfamiliar word	✓				

A. Respondent Identity

Name : Aliyah
Class/Semester : 3
Campus : Universitas Islam Makassar

B. Questionnaire Completion Instructions

1. Put a *checklist* mark on the answer that you think is most appropriate.
2. Each question only requires one answer.
3. Please answer the following questions according to your own opinion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strogly Disagree
1.	Everyone have gadget		✓			
2.	Everyone have social media		✓			

2. Habit

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strogly Disagree
3.	People follow so many account on social media			✓		
4.	Mostly people follow Digital Article account			✓		
5.	I follow one or more digital article accounts			✓		
6.	I read digital article more than 2 times a day				✓	

3. Sentence

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strogly Disagree
7.	Easy to know what the writer means in digital article				✓	
8.	It is easy to get the meassage of the digital article				✓	
9.	Digital article use unfamiliar structure		✓			
10.	Digital article use unfamiliar word		✓			

A. Respondent Identity

Name : *Suryanto*
Class/Semester : *5*
Campus : *UIM*

B. Questionnaire Completion Instructions

1. Put a *checklist* mark on the answer that you think is most appropriate.
2. Each question only requires one answer.
3. Please answer the following questions according to your own opinion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strogly Disagree
1.	Everyone have gadget	✓				
2.	Everyone have social media		✓			

2. Habit

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strogly Disagree
3.	People follow so many account on social media		✓			
4.	Mostly people follow Digital Article account		✓			
5.	I follow one or more digital article accounts			✓		
6.	I read digital article more than 2 times a day			✓		

3. Sentence

No	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Disagree	Disagree	Strogly Disagree
7.	Easy to know what the writer means in digital article					✓
8.	It is easy to get the meassage of the digital article					✓
9.	Digital article use unfamiliar structure	✓				
10.	Digital article use unfamiliar word		✓			