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Research Article

Technology-enhanced information-seeking behavior among students on Facebook and TikTok in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how students in Vietnam seek, access, and categorize information on Facebook and TikTok, and how platform-specific characteristics shape these behaviors. Grounded in the uses and gratifications framework, the study employed a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire administered to 410 students from seven member institutions of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City through stratified convenience sampling. Data were analyzed in SPSS 26.0 using Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis to assess the reliability and factor structure of the scales developed for Facebook and TikTok. The findings reveal clear differences in students' information-seeking and categorization behaviors between the two platforms. On Facebook, five distinct information categories were identified, while on TikTok only three broader categories emerged, reflecting the influence of short-form and highly personalized content. The study provides original comparative evidence from Vietnam, confirms the importance of platform structure and user motivations in shaping information-seeking behavior, and offers practical implications for improving students' digital information literacy.

Keywords: digital communication behavior, usage motivation, digital information literacy, digital content consumption, social media platforms

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, social media has become a primary channel for information access among young people worldwide. Beyond its role in social connection, platforms such as Facebook and TikTok have partially replaced the traditional function of journalism in delivering news and knowledge (Whiting & Williams, 2013). In Vietnam, with internet users accounting for over 75% of the population (DataReportal, 2025), social media has become deeply integrated into academic life, particularly within the student community.

In the field of mass communication, the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory is regarded as a critical framework for explaining users' active behavior in selecting media to satisfy personal needs. Katz et al. (1973) emphasized that users do not passively receive content but actively choose platforms that meet their needs, such as seeking information, entertainment, self-expression, or maintaining social connections. Recent studies continue to affirm the applicability of this theory in the social media environment. Whiting and Williams (2013) identified key user motivations for engaging with social media, including entertainment, social interaction, work-leisure integration, news consumption, and self-expression. Similarly, a systematic literature review found that TikTok users-particularly students-engage with the platform to fulfill needs for information, entertainment, socialization, self-integration, and convenience (Du et al., 2024). These studies underscore the

continued relevance of the U&G theory as an effective tool for explaining media choice and digital content consumption in the modern communication landscape.

In the context of Vietnamese media, Facebook remains an important platform for students to access academic information, educational policies, and content from public organizations. Meanwhile, TikTok has emerged as a phenomenon among young people due to its short-form video format, rapid content dissemination, and highly personalized algorithms (The Digital X, 2025). According to the same report, TikTok reached 86.3% of adults in Vietnam and ranked as the most time-consumed platform on a daily basis (The Digital X, 2025). Its fast-paced, diverse, and engaging entertainment content has positioned TikTok as a primary source for "hot" updates among students.

Notably, students' information-seeking behavior has shifted from a purely linear pattern (consuming from a single source) to a hybrid information behavior model. Specifically, students tend to initially obtain information from TikTok due to its speed and engaging content, but subsequently verify and expand upon it through search engines like Google or online news outlets. This trend was reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when limited access to print media and traditional classrooms compelled students to develop habits of acquiring information through digital environments (DataReportal, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025).

However, this behavior is not entirely without risk. Recent studies indicate that the spread of misinformation on TikTok, particularly in the fields of health and education, has become increasingly prevalent. Schiros et al. (2025) highlight that frequent exposure to misleading content on TikTok can reduce accurate knowledge, foster misplaced confidence, and lead to maladaptive information-seeking behaviors. For students-a group with high demands for learning and decision-making-this risk is particularly concerning.

Moreover, excessive use of social media for entertainment purposes can negatively impact academic performance. A study by Cuong et al. (2025) in Vietnam found that entertainment-driven social media use is negatively correlated with students' grade point average (GPA), whereas academically driven use does not exhibit a clear negative effect. This suggests that the motivation behind social media use can shape the quality of information engagement, thereby indirectly influencing students' academic outcomes. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to explore students' information-seeking behavior on Facebook and TikTok in Vietnam. Specifically, it focuses on analyzing the extent to which students engage with different types of information on the two platforms, comparing the characteristics of information-seeking behaviors across each platform, identifying emerging patterns of information-seeking behavior in practice, and assessing the associated risks and implications within the context of higher education and digital communication in Vietnam.

To provide a deeper understanding of students' information-seeking behavior within a multi-platform social media environment, this study develops an analytical framework that integrates theoretical foundations, technological features of communication platforms, and the prevalent content structures of each platform. This framework not only elucidates the relationship between social media usage motivations and modes of information consumption but also highlights the differences in how students categorize and engage with information on Facebook and TikTok (**Figure 1**).

The analytical framework of this study is designed to explain students' information-seeking behavior within the digital communication environment, with a focus on two popular social media platforms in Vietnam-Facebook and TikTok. At the core of the framework lies information-seeking behavior, which is shaped and influenced by three main components: the underlying theoretical foundation, the technological characteristics of each platform, and the corresponding system of information category classifications.

First, the study employs the U&G theory as the foundational approach to understanding social media user behavior. According to Katz et al. (1973), users do not passively receive information; rather, they actively select platforms and content to fulfill specific personal needs such as information seeking, entertainment, maintaining social connections, and self-expression. In the context of digital communication, this theory has been extended to explain variations in information-seeking behavior across platforms with differing structures and content formats (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Second, the distinct design features and content distribution algorithms of social media platforms directly influence how users receive and process information. Facebook is a multimedia platform supporting various formats such as text, images, long-form videos, and external links. Its distribution mechanism, based on friend

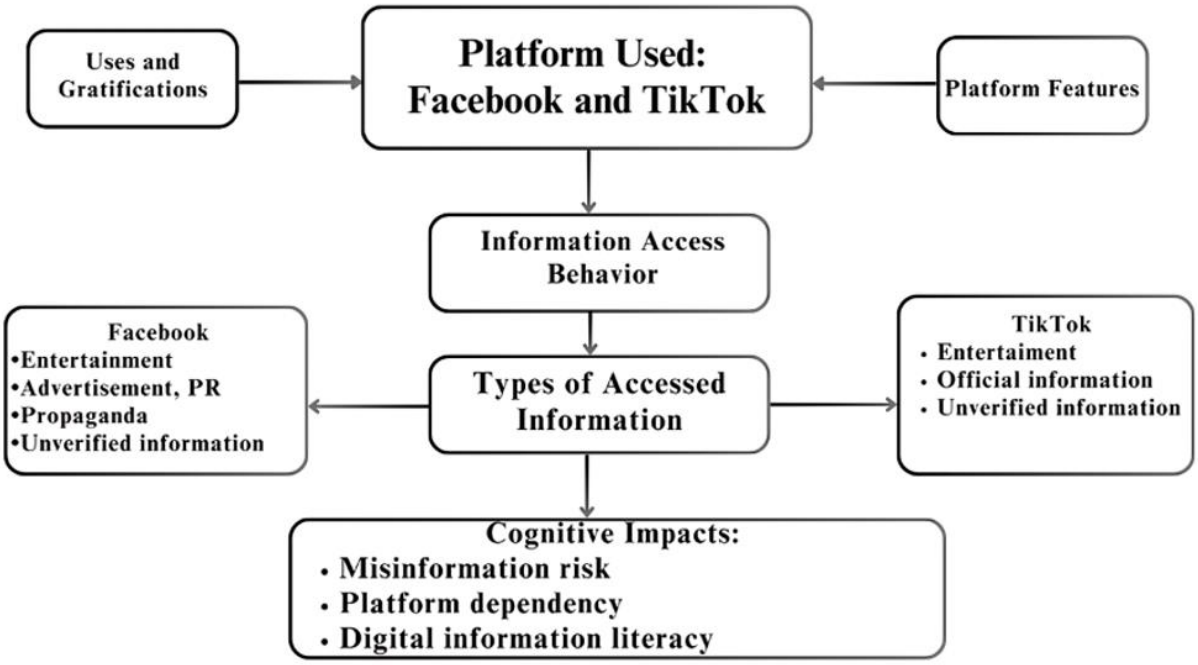

Figure 1. Analytical framework of students' information-seeking behavior on social media (Source: Nguyen Tan Khang)

networks and social groups, enables users to access more structured and reliable content. In contrast, TikTok primarily operates with short-form videos, a highly personalized recommendation system, and a focus on viral entertainment. This fundamental difference shapes the user experience: Facebook is better suited for formal and academic content, whereas TikTok emphasizes emotional, visual, and instantaneous engagement.

Third, based on platform-specific characteristics and usage patterns, the study identifies differing categories of content accessed by students across platforms. On Facebook, five distinct categories of information were retained: journalistic news, entertainment content, advertising and public relations, propaganda, and unverified information. In contrast, on TikTok, the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) retained only three main content categories: entertainment, official information (merging news and propaganda), and unverified information. This convergence of content on TikTok reflects the "hybrid" nature of information, where visual orientation, personalization, and brevity blur the boundaries between different types of content.

Building on these three components, the analytical framework demonstrates that students' information-seeking behavior is not merely a subjective individual choice but rather the result of an interaction between information needs, as explained by the U&G theory, platform-specific characteristics, and the structure of the content provided. This framework enables the study to analyze how students access, identify, and differentiate information within social media environments, thereby assessing both the risks and potential for developing digital information literacy among Vietnamese youth.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research approach to explore and measure students' information-seeking behavior on two widely used social media platforms, Facebook and TikTok. The quantitative design was strategically selected to enable the identification of platform-specific information typologies and to evaluate whether patterns of information exposure differ structurally between long-form-oriented and short-form oriented social media environments. Data were collected through a survey using questionnaires specifically designed for each platform to capture the distinctive content characteristics and information-seeking behaviors unique to each digital environment. Separate instruments were developed in order to avoid methodological artefacts arising from assuming cross-platform equivalence in content architecture and user engagement logic. This design directly supports the research question which examines how information-

seeking patterns differ between Facebook and TikTok. The survey instrument was developed based on a synthesis of theories on media content classification in digital environments while aligning with the practical characteristics of popular information types on Facebook and TikTok in Vietnam. This theoretical-empirical integration was intended to ensure both conceptual validity and contextual sensitivity, recognizing that platform affordances and algorithmic curation shape information exposure in fundamentally different ways.

The scale design was informed by the media content classification framework of Stony Brook University (2021) and adapted to the Vietnamese context using the theoretical foundations from becoming a smarter reader (VNU-HCM, 2017). These frameworks were selected because they conceptualize information not merely as media content but as cognitive input requiring evaluative literacy, which aligns with this study's focus on technology-mediated information environments. Accordingly, information types were categorized into five main groups: journalistic news, entertainment content, advertising-PR, propaganda-orientation, and raw/unverified information. This classification was analytically operationalized to test whether platform algorithms promote category differentiation as in Facebook, or category convergence as hypothesized for TikTok. Although originally developed as a pedagogical model for journalism education at Stony Brook University, the news literacy framework was formally introduced into the Vietnamese context through academic collaboration with Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, as evidenced by the publication of the news literacy manual for smart readers [Cẩm nang dành cho độc giả thông minh] (Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Faculty of Journalism and Communications, 2014). This initiative marked the institutionalization of the Stony Brook model within Vietnamese journalism education and media literacy training. The continued expansion of Stony Brook's Center for News Literacy in Vietnam since 2017 further demonstrates the framework's pedagogical sustainability and empirical relevance in the local media ecosystem (Stony Brook University, 2017). From a theoretical perspective, the Stony Brook framework conceptualizes information categories as cognitive constructs requiring evaluative literacy and verification awareness (Kruger, 2017; Stony Brook Center for News Literacy, n.d.). Its sustained use in Vietnamese journalism education and media literacy initiatives for over a decade therefore constitutes empirical evidence of its contextual validity and interpretive utility. Rather than introducing an externally imported taxonomy, the present study builds upon a locally institutionalized extension of the Stony Brook framework. Accordingly, the five-category taxonomy employed in this study reflects both the theoretical emphasis of news literacy on differentiating content based on epistemic intent and the practical need in Vietnam to equip students with evaluative criteria for navigating algorithmically curated media feeds (Kruger, 2017; Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Faculty of Journalism and Communications, 2014). The classification was further operationalized to examine whether platform architectures promote category differentiation, as observed on Facebook, or category convergence, as hypothesized for TikTok.

To ensure that the instrument accurately captured platform-specific behaviors and usage contexts, two separate measurement scales were developed, respectively for Facebook and TikTok. This decision was driven by evidence that TikTok's short-form video architecture produces hybridized information exposure patterns that differ from Facebook's feed-based content ecology. This directly addresses the research question which investigates whether information categories remain distinguishable across platforms. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never view) to 5 (view very frequently). The Likert scaling approach enables the quantification of exposure frequency, facilitating subsequent correlational and factorial analyses of information consumption behavior. This approach ensured both theoretical rigor in content classification and relevance to the media characteristics and information consumption behaviors of young users on contemporary social media platforms.

The scale development process was conducted in three stages. First, the research team reviewed both international and domestic literature to construct an initial item pool, ensuring comprehensive coverage of prevalent information types and patterns of information engagement on social media. This step was designed to establish content validity and ensure that each information category was theoretically grounded and empirically observable within Vietnamese digital culture. Second, the items were refined through expert consultation and a pilot survey prior to full-scale implementation. Expert validation was employed to evaluate semantic clarity, cultural appropriateness, and construct relevance, while the pilot survey served to detect measurement ambiguity and response bias. This stage supports the research question which concerns the validity of. Platform-specific information typologies. Third, following data collection, the scales were tested for

reliability and construct validity using Cronbach's alpha and EFA. This sequential validation strategy was adopted to ensure that observed information categories reflect latent cognitive constructs rather than artefacts of item wording or platform-specific user interface effects.

The study population comprised students enrolled at member institutions of Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM). The minimum sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error, based on a total student population of 86,504 in 2024 (VNU-HCM, 2024), resulting in a required minimum sample of 398. Yamane's (1967) formula was applied to ensure statistical representativeness while maintaining feasibility within institutional constraints. Data collection was conducted between April and May 2025, yielding a total of 442 questionnaires through both in-person and online methods. After excluding 32 invalid responses, the final valid sample consisted of 410 respondents. This sample size exceeds the minimum threshold required for multivariate analysis and factor extraction, strengthening the robustness of the statistical modelling.

The sampling strategy adopted in this study is Stratified Convenience Sampling. This approach combines the pragmatic accessibility of convenience sampling with a stratification mechanism designed to reduce institutional bias and enhance structural diversity within the sample (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, strata were defined by member institutions of VNU-HCM in order to ensure coverage across heterogeneous academic environments and disciplinary cultures, which are empirically known to shape students' information-seeking behavior (Case & Given, 2016; Riffe et al., 2019). The stratification component was deliberately introduced to mitigate the inherent limitations of convenience sampling by preventing overconcentration from any single institution and by ensuring that students from distinct academic ecosystems were systematically included (Etikan et al., 2016). The institutions included were University of Technology, University of Science, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, International University, University of Information Technology, University of Economics and Law, and University of Health Sciences. Giang University was excluded from the survey due to geographical distance and logistical constraints. This exclusion is acknowledged as a structural limitation and is explicitly addressed in the discussion of sampling bias and external validity, in line with best practices for transparent reporting in social research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Within each institutional stratum, participants were recruited based on accessibility and voluntary participation. This recruitment strategy reflects institutional constraints related to classroom access, administrative approval procedures, and student availability, which are common in multi-campus university systems and frequently necessitate the use of non-probability sampling designs in educational and behavioral research (Bryman, 2016; Robinson, 2014). While the distribution of respondents across institutions was not statistically proportional to their population sizes, the analytical focus of this study is on identifying platform-specific patterns of information-seeking behavior rather than on probabilistic generalization to the entire student population. In this respect, the sampling design prioritizes behavioral pattern detection and construct validation over population parameter estimation, a methodological orientation widely adopted in exploratory and theory-building studies of digital media behavior (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Riffe et al., 2019). The use of stratified convenience sampling in higher education and information behavior research has been recognized as an appropriate and methodologically defensible strategy under conditions of access limitation and institutional gatekeeping, provided that transparency, reflexivity, and analytical caution are maintained (Bryman, 2016; Etikan et al., 2016).

Data were collected over a two-month period, from April to May 2025, using two methods: distributing printed questionnaires directly in classrooms and administering an online survey via Google Forms. A mixed-mode distribution strategy was adopted to maximize participation rates and reduce non-response bias associated with single-channel survey delivery. Prior to participation, students were informed about the study's objectives, assured of anonymity, and notified of their right to withdraw at any time. This protocol was implemented to enhance response authenticity and reduce social desirability bias. All collected data were kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

The collected data were processed using SPSS 26.0. The data processing procedure included data cleaning, variable coding, descriptive statistics, and scale validation. This analytical pipeline was designed to sequentially validate measurement integrity prior to hypothesis testing. Descriptive statistics were employed

Table 1. Results of EFA for the information-seeking scale on Facebook

Indicator	Value
KMO	0.94
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Significance < 0.05

Table 2. Results of EFA for the information-seeking scale on TikTok

Indicator	Value
KMO	0.94
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Significance < 0.05

to characterize the sample and outline information-seeking behaviors. This step provides the empirical basis for the research question regarding platform-based behavioral patterns. The internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha; items with item-total correlations below 0.30 were removed, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of ≥ 0.70 was considered acceptable. This criterion ensures that retained items contribute meaningfully to their underlying constructs.

Next, EFA was conducted to identify the number of latent factors and establish a preliminary conceptual structure. EFA directly addresses the research question by testing whether information categories empirically converge or remain distinct across platforms. EFA was performed using the principal axis factoring extraction method with Promax rotation to account for correlated factors. This approach reflects the theoretical assumption that information categories are cognitively interrelated rather than orthogonal. The prerequisites for conducting EFA included a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of ≥ 0.60 and a statistically significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.05$). Items with factor loadings below 0.40 were removed or semantically revised.

This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Council of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (approval no. 05/GXN-XHNV-KVNH; 20 June 2025). The article reports on a sub-study within the scope of an approved larger research project. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. No personal identification information was collected, and the questionnaire was administered anonymously. All data were kept confidential, securely stored, and used solely for research purposes. The study involved no intervention and posed minimal risk to participants.

RESULTS

Scale Reliability Analysis

To assess the reliability of the measurement scales, EFA was conducted using the Principal Axis Factoring extraction method with Promax rotation. The results indicated a KMO value of 0.94, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974). Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant, confirming the presence of substantial correlations among the observed variables (**Table 1**).

For the information-seeking behavior scale on the TikTok platform, the EFA results demonstrated a high level of data adequacy. Specifically, the KMO value reached 0.95, far exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.6, indicating sufficient correlation among the variables. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (significance < 0.05), confirming that the observed variables exhibited correlations significantly different from an identity matrix, thereby validating the suitability of the factor model for the TikTok dataset (**Table 2**).

Current Status of Students' Information-Seeking on Facebook

The survey data analysis indicates that students at VNU-HCM access a wide range of information on the social media platform Facebook, reflecting a diverse pattern of information consumption spanning from entertainment purposes to the reception of public-interest and official content. The types of information are categorized into five main groups:

(1) advertising and PR content,

(2) raw/unverified information,

(3) propaganda content,

Table 3. Current status of students' information-seeking on Facebook

Information group	Symbol	Content	M	SD
Advertising information, PR	FA13	Advertising posts about consumer products, such as fashion, food, or technology.	3.03	1.11
	FA14	Brand PR content in the form of storytelling posts or sharing personal experiences.	2.95	1.09
	FA15	Livestream sales, such as livestreams selling fashion or household items.	2.66	1.19
	FA16	Advertising content about promotional programs or discounts.	2.73	1.15
	FA17	Posts from influencers or KOLs collaborating with brands.	2.80	1.15
Unverified information	FR23	Posts containing rumors or unverified information.	2.80	1.13
	FR24	Personal statuses or posts of unclear origin.	2.60	1.14
	FR25	Sensational or controversial content, especially posts using clickbait headlines.	2.78	1.19
	FR26	Livestreams or videos that are not fully moderated.	2.48	1.16
	FR27	Content with provocative elements, such as hate speech or discriminatory statements.	2.44	1.22
Propaganda information	FP18	Posts propagating government policies, such as health insurance, traffic laws, or educational reforms.	3.11	0.98
	FP19	Content promoting social movements, such as environmental protection, human rights, or gender equality.	3.21	1.01
	FP20	Propaganda articles about traditional culture, such as festivals, customs, or folk arts.	3.22	1.01
	FP21	Articles calling for community action, such as charity donations, volunteering, or blood drives.	3.17	1.02
	FP22	Propaganda content aimed at combating misinformation, such as posts warning about false information or emphasizing the importance of fact-checking.	3.10	1.07
Entertainment information	FE6	Humorous or comedic videos, such as sketches or entertaining challenges.	3.74	0.99
	FE7	Music videos, including MV, cover versions, or live performances shared online.	3.55	1.02
	FE8	Content about cinema or TV shows, including trailers, movie reviews, or behind-the-scenes footage.	3.43	1.04
	FE9	Articles about daily life, such as personal stories, community news, or social trends.	3.54	1.01
	FE10	Articles or videos about fashion and beauty, such as makeup tutorials or styling tips.	3.13	1.11
	FE11	Articles or videos about domestic skills, such as cooking, flower arranging, or home care.	3.02	1.16
	FE12	Articles or videos about pets, including care, raising, or training.	3.11	1.15
Journalistic news	FJ1	News about politics, including government policies and international political events.	3.10	0.89
	FJ2	Economic information, such as stock market updates, inflation, or businesses.	2.82	1.01
	FJ3	Social news, including education, healthcare, and social welfare issues.	3.37	0.87
	FJ4	Articles about legal matters, such as court cases or new legal regulations.	3.04	0.95
	FJ5	Breaking news, such as accidents, natural disasters, or epidemics.	3.48	0.93

(4) entertainment content, and

(5) journalistic news (**Table 3**).

Students' engagement with advertising and PR content on Facebook is at a moderate level. Among these, advertisements for consumer products such as fashion, food, or technology recorded the highest mean (M) score (M = 3.03; standard deviation [SD] = 1.11), followed by brand PR content presented through storytelling or personal experience sharing (M = 2.95; SD = 1.09). Other forms, including livestream sales (M = 2.66), promotional program content (M = 2.73), and posts from influencers/KOLs collaborating with brands (M = 2.80), were also accessed at relatively moderate levels. Overall, Facebook serves as a supplementary source of advertising information for students rather than a primary one.

The level of exposure to unverified content reveals noteworthy concerns. Posts containing rumors or unverified information had an M score of 2.80 (SD = 1.13), while sensational content or clickbait headlines were also accessed relatively frequently by students (M = 2.78; SD = 1.19). Personal posts with unclear sources (M = 2.60), uncensored livestream videos (M = 2.48), and provocative or discriminatory statements (M = 2.44) showed lower but still considerable levels of exposure. These findings highlight the risk that students may be influenced by misleading or inaccurate content on Facebook.

The propaganda-related information category recorded the highest level of engagement across the survey. Posts promoting traditional culture-such as festivals, customs, or folk arts-achieved the highest M score (M = 3.22; SD = 1.01). Content related to social movements, including environmental protection, gender equality, and human rights, was also widely accessed (M = 3.21). This was followed by calls for community action (e.g., donations, volunteering, and blood drives; M = 3.17), posts disseminating government policies (M

= 3.11), and content combating misinformation by emphasizing fact-checking (M = 3.10). These results indicate that students tend to engage with content that is community-oriented, positively directed, and of significant public value.

Entertainment emerged as the most frequently accessed information category among students. Humorous and comedic videos, such as skits or engaging challenges, received the highest engagement (M = 3.74; SD = 0.99), followed by music-related content (music videos, covers, live performances; M = 3.55) and lifestyle posts, community stories, or social trends (M = 3.54). Film and television-related content also attracted considerable attention (M = 3.43), as did fashion/beauty (M = 3.13) and culinary/home-making topics (M = 3.02). Additionally, pet-related videos achieved a relatively high level of engagement (M = 3.11). These findings suggest that Facebook remains an important entertainment platform for students, providing emotional relief and keeping them up to date with societal trends.

Students also demonstrated a considerable level of engagement with journalistic news content on Facebook. Breaking news topics such as accidents, natural disasters, and epidemics received the highest average score (M = 3.48; SD = 0.93), followed by social news (education, healthcare, social welfare; M = 3.37) and political news (M = 3.10). Legal news also garnered attention (M = 3.04), whereas economic information, such as market trends, inflation, and business news, recorded comparatively lower engagement (M = 2.82). These results indicate a selective interest among students in societal issues, with a preference for urgent and personally relevant events.

Current Status of Students' Information Access on TikTok

Survey data indicate that TikTok has emerged as a significant platform for students to access a wide range of information, particularly entertainment and lifestyle-related content. However, the levels of engagement with different types of information on TikTok differ from those on Facebook, reflecting the platform's characteristics of short-form content, high virality, and strong personalization. The information categories are divided into three main groups:

(1) raw information, advertising, and PR,

(2) entertainment information, and

(3) news and public communication (**Table 4**).

The level of access to content within the category of raw information, advertising, and PR is generally at a medium to medium-low level. Advertising videos or livestreams promoting consumer products such as food, clothing, and cosmetics recorded an average score of 2.68 (SD = 1.19), while videos promoting discount programs and special offers were accessed slightly more frequently (M = 2.76; SD = 1.27). Notably, students also frequently encountered unverified content, such as videos containing rumors (M = 2.61), unidentified personal videos (M = 2.64), and sensational or controversial content (M = 2.64). Unmoderated livestreams (M = 2.46) and videos with provocative content (M = 2.44) had lower levels of access but were still significantly present. These findings indicate that TikTok poses potential risks as a channel for disseminating unverified information to young users.

Similar to Facebook, entertainment content is the most accessed category on TikTok. Humorous videos such as challenges, games, and comedic clips recorded the highest average score (M = 3.45; SD = 1.23), followed by music-related content, including remixes, live music streams, or online gaming streams (M = 3.35), and lifestyle content featuring social trends and personal stories (M = 3.23). Content related to films and television shows (M = 3.26), fashion and beauty (M = 3.08), as well as home-making and pet-related content (M = 3.06) also exhibited high levels of access. These figures confirm that TikTok has become a primary entertainment platform for students, offering strong appeal through its short-form, dynamic, and easily accessible video format.

Compared to Facebook, the level of access to news and advocacy content on TikTok is lower but remains relatively stable. Breaking news videos covering events such as natural disasters, epidemics, and accidents recorded the highest access within this category (M = 3.10; SD = 1.16), followed by social news related to education, healthcare, and sports (M = 2.99) and legal news (M = 2.93). Political news (M = 2.89), economic news (M = 2.70), and advocacy content such as state policies, traditional culture (M = 2.97), and social movements or community action campaigns (M = 2.94) were accessed at moderate levels. These results

Table 4. Current status of students' information access on TikTok

Information group	Symbol	Content	M	SD
Unverified information (unverified, advertising, PR)	TA15	Advertising videos or livestreams of consumer products, such as food, clothing, cosmetics, or household items.	2.68	1.19
	TA16	Videos promoting sales, discounts, or special offers.	2.76	1.27
	TR21	Videos containing rumors or unverified information.	2.61	1.28
	TR22	Personal videos of unclear origin, such as sharing emotions or personal opinions.	2.64	1.29
	TR23	Sensational or controversial videos, such as videos with shocking titles or content.	2.64	1.30
	TR24	Livestreams or directly recorded videos that are not fully moderated.	2.46	1.28
	TR25	Videos with provocative content, such as hate speech or discriminatory remarks.	2.44	1.30
Entertainment information	TJ6	Lifestyle videos, such as personal stories, community news, or social trends.	3.23	1.22
	TE7	Humorous videos, such as challenges, games, or funny clips.	3.45	1.23
	TE8	Music videos, such as live performances, short MVs, remixes, online gaming content, gaming tips, challenges, or game streaming.	3.35	1.25
	TE9	Videos introducing films or TV shows, such as clips, reviews, or behind-the-scenes footage.	3.26	1.24
	TE11	Fashion and beauty videos, such as makeup tutorials, outfit coordination, or beauty tips.	3.08	1.28
	TE13	Domestic skills videos, such as cooking, flower arrangement, home care, and/or pet care, training, or raising pets.	3.06	1.29
News and propaganda	TJ1	Videos related to political news, such as government policies or international political events.	2.89	1.19
	TJ2	Videos providing economic information, such as stock market updates, business news, or market prices.	2.70	1.17
	TJ3	Videos sharing social news, such as education, healthcare, sports, or social welfare.	2.99	1.18
	TJ4	Legal news videos, such as court cases or new regulations.	2.93	1.17
	TJ5	Breaking news videos, such as accidents, natural disasters, or epidemics.	3.10	1.16
	TP20	Videos propagating government policies or traditional culture.	2.97	1.19
	TP23	Videos promoting social movements or community action campaigns.	2.94	1.22

Note. Item codes follow the initial theoretical categorization to allow transparent comparison between the original five-category design and the three-factor solution observed on TikTok

indicate that while TikTok is not a primary source for official news consumption, it still plays a significant role in disseminating public-interest information to students.

DISCUSSION

Survey results reveal that while Facebook retains the five original information categories as designed-news, entertainment, advertising/PR, advocacy, and unverified information-on TikTok, these categories tend to converge, with only three groups remaining after factor analysis: entertainment, verified/official information (including both news and advocacy), and unverified information. Students engage in different strategies when seeking information on social media. These strategies can include behavioral actions (such as browsing, liking, sharing, and commenting), procedural methods (applying heuristics or problem-solving to find relevant content), and metacognitive approaches (evaluating and questioning the accuracy and reliability of information). Effective information-seeking behavior requires not only the ability to locate information but also critical evaluation skills, especially given the abundance of misinformation or unverified content circulating on social media platforms (Hafiar et al., 2023). More broadly, information-seeking research emphasizes that evaluation and verification are central components of information practice, especially in digitally mediated environments where credibility cues are unevenly distributed across platforms (Case & Given, 2016).

The differentiated factor structure observed on Facebook suggests that Vietnamese students are able to cognitively recognize and behaviorally separate information types according to production intent and epistemic function. In feed-based environments where source identity, publisher branding, link previews, and comment threads remain salient, users can infer whether content is intended to inform, persuade, mobilize, sell, or entertain. The empirical clustering of journalistic news, advertising-PR, advocacy, entertainment, and unverified information into distinct latent factors therefore reflects an intent-based classification logic that aligns with students' everyday interpretive practices on Facebook. By contrast, the convergent factor structure

observed on TikTok indicates that platform affordances substantially reshape the behavioral salience of information categories. Advertising and unverified content converge into a single latent domain characterized by algorithmic amplification, affect-driven presentation, and limited provenance cues. Similarly, journalistic news and advocacy-oriented messaging form a unified construct of public-affairs information, reflecting the circulation of policy updates, social campaigns, and current affairs through identical short-video formats. These convergence patterns are theoretically interpretable as the outcome of TikTok's short-form architecture and hyper-personalized feed, which foreground attention cues over epistemic intent at the point of consumption. Importantly, this convergence is consistent with evidence that public-affairs content on TikTok is frequently packaged in entertaining, compressed storytelling formats, which can blur conventional genre boundaries for young audiences (Peña-Fernández et al., 2022).

In addition to platform affordances, the findings should be interpreted in relation to the role of digital visuals in social learning environments. Echano et al. (2026) show that visual formats such as memes and short videos enhance engagement and memorability but may also encourage heuristic processing and reduce analytical depth. In the context of TikTok, where content is highly visual and compressed, elements such as captions, overlays, and editing styles can function as interpretive shortcuts. These visual cues may blur distinctions between information types and contribute to the convergence observed in this study.

This distinction reflects the platform-specific design and differing patterns of information reception among users across the two digital environments. Facebook functions as a multimedia platform that allows users to engage with diverse content formats, including long-form content, images, links, and videos, thereby facilitating the differentiation and categorization of information types. Moreover, Facebook's content recommendation algorithms largely rely on network connections, groups, and shared interests rather than full personalization as seen on TikTok. This enables users to access information within "clearly defined content contexts," making it easier to distinguish between different types of information (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

The EFA patterns observed in this study can be explained through the concept of platform affordances, referring to how platform design features shape users' information exposure and interpretation (Ronzhyn et al., 2023). This affordance perspective has been widely used to explain how platform features (e.g., visibility of source cues, interface structures, and recommendation logics) shape what users can do and how they interpret content (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). On Facebook, affordances such as visible source cues, diverse content formats, and network-based recommendation systems facilitate users' ability to distinguish content according to production intent. This design environment supports the behavioral separation of news, entertainment, advertising-PR, advocacy, and unverified information, resulting in a differentiated factor structure. In contrast, TikTok's affordances are centered on hyper-personalized recommendation and short-form, engagement-driven video delivery. Prior research shows that TikTok's algorithm prioritizes watch time and interaction, reducing the salience of genre and source cues (Montag et al., 2021). As a result, persuasive, sensational, and entertainment elements frequently co-occur in the same content stream, leading to the convergence of information categories observed in the TikTok EFA. The factor structure therefore reflects how platform architectures reorganize information exposure into fewer, affect-driven behavioral domains. This pattern aligns with the broader argument that short-video platforms "platformize" content distribution through engagement optimization, which can produce systematic shifts in how users encounter and classify information (Kaye et al., 2021).

The findings can also be interpreted through the lens of cognitive independence in digital learning. Ussenova et al. (2025) demonstrate that students' information processing is shaped by motivation, self-regulation, and cognitive engagement. This suggests that differences between Facebook and TikTok are not only platform-driven but also user-dependent. Students with stronger self-regulation may better differentiate and evaluate information, while others may rely more on surface-level cues, reinforcing category convergence.

The differentiated factor structure on Facebook supports the theoretical assumptions of the Stony Brook framework, which conceptualizes information categories according to epistemic intent and production logic. The empirical clustering of theoretically related items indicates that the adapted scale captures meaningful cognitive distinctions, providing evidence of convergent and discriminant validity (Asghar, 2015). The convergent structure on TikTok does not contradict the Stony Brook model but demonstrates that the

behavioral salience of epistemic categories is contingent on technological context. In short-form, algorithmically curated environments, genre boundaries become less visible at the point of consumption, leading to category convergence. From a construct validity perspective, this pattern indicates that the instrument is sensitive to platform-specific conditions while still measuring theoretically grounded information domains. The scale therefore demonstrates validity both in environments where genre cues are salient (Facebook) and where algorithmic mediation dominates (TikTok). In other words, the cross-platform divergence in factor structure strengthens construct validity by showing that the measurement model is responsive to meaningful contextual variation rather than enforcing the same categorical separations across distinct media ecologies (Asghar, 2015; Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

In contrast, TikTok operates on a hyper-personalized content recommendation mechanism driven by real-time user interactions, which blurs the boundaries between different types of content. Many videos simultaneously incorporate elements of advertising, entertainment, emotional appeal, and even unverified information. This convergence results in a diminished distinction between an entertainment video and one intended for PR or propaganda. According to Alhabash and Smischney (2024), on short-video platforms like TikTok, the primary motivations for use are relaxation, trend-following, and self-expression; consequently, users' information consumption tends to be emotionally driven and context-dependent rather than organized and categorized by content function. This effect is reinforced by visual storytelling formats that prioritize imagery and pace over explicit informational structure. Recent work also notes that news organizations themselves increasingly employ infotainment-style storytelling on TikTok, which may further normalize hybrid "information-as-entertainment" formats for audiences (Wirz & Zai, 2025). Overall, the findings suggest that information convergence on TikTok reflects the combined influence of platform affordances, visual content design, and users' cognitive engagement.

This difference can also be explained through the U&G framework, which posits that users select media platforms based on personal needs and usage motivations. In the context of social media, these needs include entertainment, social interaction, information seeking, and self-expression (Katz et al., 1973; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Facebook is better suited for fulfilling needs related to accessing official information, engaging in academic exchange, and community connectivity. In contrast, TikTok more effectively satisfies the demand for rapid entertainment, trend-following, and personal exploration, resulting in information-seeking behavior that is less analytical and categorized but more immediate and visually engaging.

In summary, the retention of five information categories on Facebook compared to only three on TikTok reflects differences in content structure and user behavior across the two platforms. While Facebook provides a space for accessing and analyzing diverse information, TikTok emphasizes rapid, flexible content consumption with less clearly defined categorical structures. This distinction is not merely technical but also reflects a deeper manifestation of new-generation media behavior, where usage motivations, technological formats, and cultural context collectively shape the way young users engage with information. Viewed analytically, the results suggest a shift from genre-based information typology (more visible on Facebook) toward fluid, hybridized typologies on TikTok, where epistemic intent is embedded within affective, short-form narratives (Peña-Fernández et al., 2022; Wirz & Zai, 2025).

As digital media increasingly shapes students' information landscape, comparing information-seeking behavior on Facebook and TikTok helps clarify usage patterns and related risks. Students frequently use both platforms, but their purposes, accessed content, and engagement patterns differ. Social media serves as a primary source of timely information, offering fast and interactive access (Amiri et al., 2022). Students primarily use TikTok for entertainment-oriented content such as humor, music, trends, and lifestyle, which generates high engagement. This is driven by short-form videos, rapid virality, and personalized recommendation algorithms. As Anderson and Jiang (2018) note, generation Z (Gen Z) prefers visually rich platforms like TikTok for entertainment and self-expression rather than for seeking official information. In contrast, Facebook serves broader purposes, including news, policy information, and community engagement, with higher access to current affairs and civic content. Its combination of text, images, and external links supports more in-depth and structured information. This underscores Facebook's relatively stable role as a platform delivering in-depth information, even if it is less visually engaging than TikTok. Student engagement with advertising and PR content differs across platforms: Facebook is more frequently used for brand promotions and influencer content, while TikTok-despite its potential in short-form ads and

livestream commerce-shows lower engagement. This reflects trust and habitual consumption patterns linked to perceived platform credibility (Hai & Xiong, 2025).

Both platforms expose students to unverified and sensational content, which may negatively affect behavior and mental well-being. Although the average engagement is moderate, misinformation can harm behavior and mental well-being: high social media use in settings with unverified information is linked to stress and anxiety among Vietnamese youth (Nguyen et al., 2025). TikTok is a major source of health content - 92.4% of respondents encountered it accidentally and many perceive high levels of information (Kirkpatrick & Lawrie, 2024). Exposure to misleading ADHD content on TikTok can produce misunderstanding, misplaced confidence, and reliance on unverified treatments (Schiros et al., 2025).

However, exposure to misinformation is not unique to TikTok. Nguyen et al. (2025) indicate that in Vietnam, students who frequently use social media are at higher risk of mental health issues, particularly when exposed to negative or inaccurate information. This suggests that information evaluation skills serve as a critical mediating factor between social media use and mental well-being. Interestingly, according to Axios (2020), Gen Z exhibits higher confidence in identifying misinformation, with 83% believing they are less likely to be deceived by fake news compared to previous generations. Nevertheless, evidence from the aforementioned studies shows that this confidence does not always correspond to accurate assessment, especially when content is presented in an engaging and highly viral format.

A fundamental factor shaping students' information-seeking behavior is the content personalization algorithms employed by social media platforms. On TikTok in particular, the "for you" recommendation system can lead users into an "information echo chamber," where they are predominantly exposed to content aligned with their personal interests, reducing their exposure to diverse information sources. This phenomenon has been similarly highlighted by Cinelli et al. (2021), who found that excessive consumption of personalized content can distort perception and undermine critical information evaluation skills. On platforms like TikTok, this issue is exacerbated by the rapid dissemination of content, which occurs at a much faster pace than on traditional platforms.

Overall, Facebook and TikTok serve different informational functions in students' engagement. While Facebook functions as a comprehensive information platform, supporting both official and community-oriented content, TikTok leans toward entertainment, trends, and self-expression. However, both platforms share a common risk of disseminating misinformation, highlighting the need for students to develop digital media literacy skills to access, evaluate, and critically engage with information responsibly and effectively.

An important aspect to consider in students' information-seeking behavior is the differing purposes of using Facebook and TikTok. According to the U&G framework (Katz et al., 1973; Whiting & Williams, 2013), users actively select social media platforms based on specific information and psychological needs. In this study, students tend to use Facebook for news updates, academic connectivity, and following activities of their university or governmental bodies, whereas TikTok is primarily used for entertainment, exploring lifestyle trends, and self-expression. This distinction indicates that information consumption behavior is influenced not only by content but also by the underlying motivations for using each platform.

Moreover, information analysis and evaluation skills (information literacy) play a crucial mediating role in students' information-seeking process. In the digital environment, where information spreads rapidly and is often uncontrolled, users need the capacity to identify reliable sources, distinguish misinformation, and develop a reflex for verification. Although some students may be aware of the risks of misinformation–as Axios (2020) indicates, 83% of Gen Z believe they are less likely to be deceived by fake news than previous generations-research in Vietnam shows that this group remains vulnerable to negative psychological effects when exposed to misinformation (Nguyen et al., 2025). This highlights a paradox between perceived confidence and actual critical evaluation ability, emphasizing the need to integrate digital media literacy education into university curricula.

The socio-cultural context also represents a notable distinction in the discussion. While TikTok is rising in popularity due to its short-form, fast-spreading, and highly personalized content, Facebook in Vietnam continues to hold the position as the most widely used social media platform for accessing official information from the press, universities, and government agencies. This helps explain why students still engage more with policy news, propaganda, or community activities on Facebook. This contrasts with Western contexts, where

traditional media remains the primary source of public-interest information. Despite the growing popularity of TikTok for its short, fast-spreading, and highly personalized content, Facebook remains the primary platform trusted for accessing official information from the press, universities, and government agencies. College students engage more with policy news, propaganda, and community activities on Facebook. This pattern is less typical in many Western settings, where traditional media still dominates as the primary source of public information. Cultural and historical factors in Vietnam play a key role in shaping media consumption patterns and student preferences for platforms perceived as more credible (Miraj et al. (2021).

Notably, students' information-seeking behavior is also shaped by temporal and social contexts, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. During periods of social distancing, both Facebook and TikTok experienced a surge in user engagement, and students gradually developed habits of obtaining information through social media rather than print or traditional channels. Consequently, information behavior shifted toward a hybrid model, where users consult TikTok for "breaking" or trending information while seeking supplementary details via Google or established news outlets. This transition underscores the need for journalism and public media platforms to adapt their content delivery methods to align with the evolving content consumption habits of young audiences.

Finally, a potential analytical approach is to categorize students' information-seeking behavior. Based on empirical data, three main user groups can be identified: first, the passive consumers-primarily scrolling through TikTok for entertainment without actively seeking information; second, the active information seekers-following official Facebook pages and verifying sources; and third, the cross-checkers-utilizing multiple platforms to compare and analyze information. This classification illustrates that students' information-seeking behavior is diverse, flexible, and capable of shifting across levels of engagement depending on the usage context and the content of interest.

CONCLUSION

This study advances understanding of VNU-HCM students' information-seeking behavior by developing and validating platform-specific measurement scales for Facebook and TikTok, grounded in U&G. The findings indicate that information typologies are not platform-neutral: Facebook largely preserves an intent-based structure in which students distinguish news, entertainment, advertising/PR, advocacy, and unverified content, whereas TikTok reorganizes exposure into hybrid, attention-driven categories where entertainment, persuasion, and public affairs frequently blend. In this sense, short-form video platforms do not merely "host" information; they reshape how information is encountered and cognitively organized within the study sample.

The factor-analytic evidence supports this interpretation. With strong KMO values and significant Bartlett's tests, the scales demonstrate robust reliability and construct validity, while also revealing a meaningful structural divergence across platforms. Facebook retains five differentiated factors, but TikTok consolidates them into three domains-entertainment, verified/official (including news and advocacy), and unverified content. This convergence is best interpreted as a behavioral consequence of TikTok's short-video architecture, rapid content turnover, and hyper-personalized recommendation system, which heighten cognitive load and shift attention toward affective cues and engagement signals rather than source identity or production intent. Substantively, these results suggest that, among students surveyed across VNU-HCM member institutions, information practices are shaped by a dual-platform ecology: Facebook functions as a semi-official information infrastructure linked to institutions and mainstream media, while TikTok operates as a creator-led attention economy shaped by influencer culture and algorithmic amplification, producing distinct patterns of trust, credibility assessment, and cross-platform verification.

These findings refine theory and inform practice in two ways. Theoretically, they position information typology as a context-dependent construct shaped by platform affordances, local media culture, and cognitive constraints, extending U&G to a multi-platform environment where "information" is algorithmically organized. Practically, they underscore the need for platform-specific digital literacy: educators should train students to recognize algorithmic bias, assess short-form video credibility, and critically evaluate influencer-mediated claims, while policymakers should strengthen transparency and labelling requirements for sponsored and political content on short-video platforms. At the same time, limitations remain-self-selection bias, reliance on self-reported behavior, absence of behavioral trace data, and lack of qualitative triangulation-so the

conclusions should not be generalized beyond the study context. Future mixed-methods research across a broader range of institutions and regions is needed to clarify the confidence-evaluation paradox and the emerging pattern of "TikTok for discovery, Facebook for verification" in students' everyday information practices.

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