

University Students' Access to Information on Social Media: Scale Development and Validation in the Vietnamese Context

Nguyen Tan Khang^{1,2}

¹University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

²Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Correspondence: Nguyen Tan Khang, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Email: nguyentankhang@hcmussh.edu.vn

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Abstract

This study aims to develop and validate a scale measuring university students' access to information on social media in the Vietnamese context, focusing on two popular platforms: Facebook and TikTok. Based on a classification model of information types comprising five content categories-journalistic news, entertainment, advertising and public relations, propaganda or orientation-oriented content, and raw or unverified information -the author designed two separate survey instruments. Data were collected from 410 students at Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City in 2025 and analyzed using statistical techniques, including Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Cronbach's Alpha reliability testing. The results indicate that the Facebook scale retained the theoretical five-factor structure with high internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.80$). In contrast, the TikTok scale converged into three new factors, shaped by content blending under the influence of recommendation algorithms and visual presentation formats, reflecting the platform's distinctive information reception characteristics. Both scales met the criteria for construct validity and reliability, contributing to the expansion of research tools in the field of social media studies, while also supporting educational and communication policymakers in better understanding youth information consumption behavior.

Keywords: media reception, scale reliability, measurement of digital behavior, algorithmic impact, applied communication

1. Introduction

Social media has become a central channel through which young people access and encounter information in everyday life. In Vietnam, Facebook and TikTok are among the most widely used social media platforms, particularly among university students, who use these platforms not only for entertainment and social connection but also for academic, social, health-related, political, and everyday-life information (N. C. Pham et al., 2020; Simon Kemp, 2024). Unlike traditional media consumption, information access on social media occurs through both active searching and passive exposure shaped by platform algorithms, recommendation systems, and users' prior engagement patterns (Kümpel et al., 2015; Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

Access to information on social media should therefore be understood not merely as time spent online or frequency of platform use, but as exposure to different types of content with different communicative purposes. Drawing on the news literacy and media classification framework, information on social media can be grouped into several major categories, including journalistic news, entertainment, advertising and public relations, propaganda or orientation-oriented content, and raw or unverified information (Stony Brook Center for News Literacy & University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM, 2020; Stony Brook University, 2021). This distinction is important because social media users may encounter verified news, commercial messages, civic communication, entertainment, and misinformation within the same platform interface, often without clear boundaries between content types.

Previous studies have examined social media use among young people and students from various perspectives, including engagement, addiction, academic performance, psychological well-being, privacy concerns, and media and information literacy. Ni et al. (2020) developed the Social Media Engagement Scale for Adolescents to measure adolescents' engagement with social media, while Natrayan et al. (2019) examined students' social media attitudes and academic performance. Other studies have focused on media and information literacy competencies (Cela et al., 2025; Natrayan et

al., 2019; Ni et al., 2020), content-based media exposure among adolescents (den Hamer et al., 2017), and social media interaction among youth (Shafiq et al., 2024). These studies provide useful measurement foundations, yet most existing instruments focus on general use, attitudes, interaction, literacy, or effects rather than measuring the specific types of information that students access on different social media platforms.

In the Vietnamese context, recent studies have explored social media addiction among youth (Doan et al., 2022), students' use of social media for English vocabulary learning (M. T. Pham et al., 2023), privacy concerns on TikTok (Duong et al., 2024), trust and fake news awareness among student TikTok users (Lan & Tung, 2024), and the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being or academic performance (Cuong et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). Although these studies contribute important insights into Vietnamese students' digital behavior, they do not systematically measure the extent to which students access different types of information such as journalistic news, entertainment, advertising and public relations content, propaganda-oriented messages, or raw and unverified information.

This gap is particularly important because Facebook and TikTok represent different information environments. Facebook allows users to encounter news links, posts, groups, advertisements, livestreams, and user-generated content in relatively diverse formats. TikTok, by contrast, is characterized by short-form video, algorithmic recommendation, rapid content circulation, and visually engaging presentation, which may blur the boundaries between information categories such as news, entertainment, advertising, and propaganda (Anderson, 2020; Cervi et al., 2023; Medina Serrano et al., 2020). Therefore, a measurement scale developed for one platform may not fully capture how users access and perceive information on another platform.

To address this gap, the present study aims to develop and validate two platform-specific scales measuring university students' access to different types of information on Facebook and TikTok in the Vietnamese context. Specifically, the study examines whether a five-category information framework-journalistic news, entertainment, advertising and public relations, propaganda or orientation-oriented content, and raw or unverified information-can be empirically validated across the two platforms. By comparing the factor structures of the Facebook and TikTok scales, this study contributes to measurement development in social media research and provides evidence of how platform characteristics may shape students' information reception.

2. Method

The scales used in this study were developed to measure university students' access to different types of information on social media rather than their general level of social media use, attitudes toward social media, addiction tendency, media literacy, or interaction intensity. Existing instruments have provided important foundations for measuring social media engagement, media exposure, media and information literacy, and social media-related academic or psychological outcomes. However, these tools generally focus on how often users use social media, how they interact with content, how competent they are in evaluating information, or how social media affects learning and well-being. They do not directly measure the extent to which students access distinct types of information, such as journalistic news, entertainment, advertising and public relations content, propaganda or orientation-oriented messages, and raw or unverified information.

The present study therefore differs from previous measurement tools in three main ways. First, it adopts a content-type approach by classifying information according to communicative purpose rather than general platform use or user attitude. Second, it develops two parallel but platform-specific scales for Facebook and TikTok, allowing the study to examine whether the same theoretical information categories operate similarly across different social media environments. Third, it explicitly considers the distinctive content dynamics of TikTok, where short-form videos, algorithmic recommendation, visual storytelling, influencer-based communication, livestream selling, and emotionally engaging formats may blur the boundaries between news, entertainment, advertising, propaganda, and unverified information.

This platform-specific design is particularly important because TikTok differs from Facebook not only in format but also in the way information is delivered and consumed. On Facebook, users may encounter information through posts, links, groups, pages, comments, livestreams, and shared news articles. These formats often allow users to identify sources, textual cues, or institutional origins more clearly. On TikTok, however, information is commonly delivered through short videos on the For You Page, where source identity, communicative intent, and content category may be less visible. A video may simultaneously entertain, advertise, persuade, report, or promote a viewpoint. For this reason, the TikTok scale was not treated as a simple replication of the Facebook scale; rather, it was designed to test whether the five theoretical information categories would remain distinct or empirically converge under TikTok's algorithm-driven and visually oriented content environment.

The initial item pool was developed based on the five-category information classification framework, including: (1) journalistic news, (2) entertainment content, (3) advertising and public relations content, (4) propaganda or orientation-oriented content, and (5) raw or unverified information. Items were adapted to reflect the specific content forms commonly encountered on Facebook and TikTok. For Facebook, items referred to posts, news links, fan pages, groups,

advertisements, livestreams, and user-generated updates. For TikTok, items were adapted to short-form videos, For You Page recommendations, influencer/KOL content, livestream sales, trending sounds, visual effects, and viral clips. This adaptation aimed to improve ecological validity by ensuring that each item reflected the actual information environment of the platform being measured.

The target population comprised students from member institutions of Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM). The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula (as cited in Glenn, 1992):

$$n = N / [1 + N \cdot (e^2)]$$

In which:

N: The total number of students in 2024 was $N = 86,504$, according to the 2024 Annual Report of VNU-HCM (Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, 2024).

e: acceptable margin of error ($e = 0.05$)

Accordingly, after calculation, the minimum required sample size was $n \approx 398$ students. The details of the stratified sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Stratified Sample by Member University of VNU-HCM (Based on 2024 Enrollment Data)

No.	Unit (Member University)	Number of Students	Proportion (%)	Stratified Sample (n_i)
1	University of Technology	23.696	27.39	109
2	University of Science	15.883	18.36	73
3	University of Social Sciences and Humanities	16.543	19.13	76
4	International University	8.510	9.84	39
5	University of Information Technology	9.235	10.67	42
6	University of Economics and Law	10.927	12.63	50
7	University of Health Sciences	1.710	1.98	8
Total		86.504	100	398

Source: Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM); Author

A total of 442 questionnaires were collected through both offline and online modes from April to May 2025. After excluding 32 invalid responses, the final valid dataset consisted of 410 completed questionnaires. The sampling approach employed was stratified convenience sampling by member university, aiming to ensure a relatively representative distribution across the participating academic units.

The member institutions of Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) included in the stratified sampling were: the University of Technology, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Economics and Law, University of Science, University of Health Sciences, International University, and University of Information Technology. An Giang University was excluded from the sampling frame due to its geographic distance and significant contextual differences in its student population. Within each stratum, students were selected using convenience sampling based on availability and willingness to participate. The final sample size of 410 was considered adequate for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), as it exceeded the commonly recommended threshold of 5 to 10 observations per observed variable, ensuring sufficient statistical power and reliability for scale validation.

Data were collected between April and May 2025 using both printed questionnaires and online surveys via Google Forms. The combination of offline and online data collection was used to increase accessibility and response coverage across different student groups. Before participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. No personally identifiable information was required. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any point before submitting the questionnaire. The use of self-reported survey data was appropriate for the purpose of measuring students' perceived frequency of access to different types of information on social media. However, because self-reported responses may be affected by recall bias or social desirability bias, the results should be interpreted as students' reported access patterns rather than objective behavioral tracking data.

In this study, data processing and analysis were conducted with the aim of assessing the reliability and preliminary construct structure of the newly developed survey instrument within the context of students at Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM). Data obtained from the pilot survey were analyzed entirely using SPSS version 26.0, which is suitable for initial tool development studies that do not require confirmatory modeling or structural equation modeling.

First, all data were cleaned, checked for missing values, and coded before analysis. Subsequently, descriptive statistics were employed to examine the demographic characteristics of the sample and the distribution of the measurement variables. Indicators such as mean, standard deviation, maximum, and minimum values were calculated to facilitate preliminary data screening.

For the two newly developed scales measuring students' information access on Facebook and TikTok, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Items with item-total correlations below 0.30 were removed, and an Alpha coefficient of ≥ 0.70 was considered indicative of acceptable reliability. EFA was selected because the study aimed to develop and preliminarily validate new measurement scales in a specific social and platform context. Although the initial item design was guided by a five-category theoretical framework, the empirical structure of information access—especially on TikTok—could not be assumed in advance due to the platform's algorithmic recommendation system, short-form video format, and tendency to blend communicative purposes. Therefore, EFA was appropriate for identifying whether the theoretically proposed categories remained distinct or converged into new empirical factors.

Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation was used because the latent dimensions of information access were expected to be correlated. The suitability of the data for EFA was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. A KMO value of 0.60 or higher and a statistically significant Bartlett's test were considered acceptable. Items with factor loadings below 0.40 or substantial cross-loadings were removed or reconsidered based on both statistical and theoretical criteria. Item removal was conducted through an iterative process combining statistical criteria and theoretical interpretability. Items were removed if they met one or more of the following conditions: (1) factor loading below 0.40; (2) substantial cross-loading on two or more factors, indicating weak discriminant capacity; or (3) conceptual inconsistency with the emerging factor structure after rotation. For the TikTok scale, item removal was interpreted not merely as a technical procedure but also as evidence of content blending in a short-video, algorithm-driven environment, where theoretically distinct information categories may be perceived similarly by users. The Facebook and TikTok scales were analyzed separately. This separate analysis allowed the study to evaluate whether the same five-category framework operated similarly across platforms or whether platform-specific content dynamics led to different factor structures.

In summary, the data analysis techniques employed in this study were selected to ensure that the newly developed measurement scales exhibit high reliability, a clear factor structure, and are suitable for implementation in the official survey phase for use in subsequent validation studies.

3. Results

3.1 Results of Reliability and Construct Validity Analysis of the Facebook Information Access Scale

The scale was developed based on the media content classification framework proposed by Stony Brook University (2021) and theoretical foundations from the book *Becoming a Smart News Consumer* (Various authors, 2017). The content was categorized into five main types: (1) journalistic news, (2) entertainment, (3) advertising and PR, (4) propaganda, and (5) raw information. Each category included 4 to 8 items, resulting in a total of 29 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never watch) to 5 (very frequently watch). The collected data were analyzed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to examine the latent structure, and internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) indicated that the scale met the criteria for construct validity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.94, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), confirming the suitability of the factor model (see Table 2).

Table 2. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for the Facebook Information Access Scale

Indicator	Value
KMO	0.94
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Sig. < 0.05

Source: Author

Five factors were extracted, accounting for a total of 68.78% of the explained variance, indicating a high level of discriminant capacity among the information categories (see Table 3). Two items were removed due to insufficient factor loadings or cross-loadings across multiple factors.

Table 3. Extracted Factors and Explained Variance of the Facebook Information Access Scale

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Cumulative Variance (%)
Factor 1	11.13	41.21	41.21
Factor 2	2.77	10.26	51.47
Factor 3	2.08	7.69	59.16
Factor 4	1.53	5.68	64.84
Factor 5	1.06	3.94	68.78

Source: Author

The retention of the five-factor structure suggests that Facebook users in this sample were able to distinguish among

different communicative purposes of social media content, including journalism, entertainment, advertising and public relations, propaganda or orientation-oriented content, and raw information. This finding is consistent with previous literature suggesting that Facebook provides a relatively heterogeneous information environment in which users encounter news links, institutional pages, personal posts, advertisements, livestreams, and group-based communication within the same platform. Compared with short-form video platforms, Facebook still preserves more visible textual, source-based, and format-based cues that may help users differentiate among information categories.

The five extracted factors corresponded to the initial theoretical assumptions regarding the classification of information content on Facebook (see Table 4). Specifically, the “Advertising and PR” factor (FAE-1) consisted of eight items related to product advertisements, branded content, livestream selling, and posts by influencers. The factor loadings for this group ranged from 0.614 to 0.734, indicating a strong correlation with the underlying latent construct. This was also the largest factor in terms of item count, reflecting the abundance of promotional content on social media platforms such as Facebook.

The “Raw Information” factor (FR-2) comprised five items and exhibited the highest factor loadings across the entire scale, ranging from 0.803 to 0.837. These items represent content that is unverified, sensational, or controversial, which is the kind of information that tends to go viral but often raises questions about accuracy. The high loadings indicate that participants were able to clearly distinguish this content category as a separate factor, with a high level of perceptual consistency in identifying such content.

The “Entertainment” factor (FP-3) included items related to music, films, sports, fashion, and humorous content, with factor loadings ranging from 0.647 to 0.735. This type of information is among the most prevalent on social media and is highly consumed by the younger user demographic. The fact that all items in this group loaded strongly onto a single factor supports the notion that users tend to perceive entertainment as a distinct purpose when engaging with Facebook.

The “Propaganda and Advocacy” factor (FEJ-4) consisted of five items related to messages about public policy, social movements, traditional values, and community behavior recommendations. The factor loadings ranged from 0.511 to 0.809. Although one item (FJ5) had a relatively lower loading compared to the others, the factor maintained a stable structure. This reflects the diversity of propaganda content, yet participants were still able to recognize it as a distinct category.

Finally, the “Journalistic News” factor (FJ-5) included four items representing mainstream news content such as politics, economics, society, and law. The factor loadings ranged from 0.646 to 0.801, indicating a strong fit between the observed items and the latent construct. These results also suggest that students still retain the ability to distinguish mainstream journalistic sources from other types of content on Facebook.

Table 4. Construct Validity Results from Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of the Facebook Information Access Scale

Item	Factor				
	FAE-1	FR-2	FP-3	FEJ-4	FJ-5
FA15	.734				
FE11	.704				
FE13	.670				
FA17	.652				
FE12	.650				
FA16	.648				
FA18	.625				
FA19	.614				
FR27		.837			
FR28		.827			
FR29		.822			
FR26		.819			
FR25		.803			
FP21			.735		
FP22			.693		
FP20			.687		
FP23			.664		
FP24			.647		
FE7				.809	
FE8				.690	
FE9				.676	
FJ6				.659	
FJ5				.511	
FJ1					.801
FJ2					.775
FJ4					.686
FJ3					.646

Source: Author

The internal consistency analysis indicated that all five factors achieved Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.800 or higher (see Table 5). Specifically, the "Advertising & PR" group reached 0.919, the "Raw Information" group scored 0.923, the "Entertainment" group reported 0.874, the "Propaganda & Advocacy" group had 0.819, and the "Journalistic News" group achieved 0.800. These results demonstrate a high level of internal reliability, confirming that the scale is consistent and appropriate for use in social science research.

Table 5. Internal Consistency Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of the Facebook Information Access Scale

Overall Cronbach's Alpha	Observed Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
(FAE-1) 0.919	FE11	20.31	41.65	0.70	0.91
	FE12	20.42	41.20	0.70	0.91
	FE13	20.32	42.33	0.63	0.92
	FA15	20.40	40.66	0.78	0.90
	FA16	20.49	40.97	0.78	0.90
	FA17	20.78	40.61	0.72	0.91
	FA18	20.70	40.56	0.76	0.91
	FA19	20.64	40.38	0.77	0.90
(FP-3) 0.874	FP20	12.70	11.68	0.68	0.85
	FP21	12.61	10.99	0.78	0.83
	FP22	12.59	11.43	0.69	0.85
	FP23	12.64	11.20	0.72	0.84
	FP24	12.72	11.37	0.64	0.86
(FR-2) 0.923	FR25	10.31	17.50	0.77	0.91
	FR26	10.50	17.28	0.79	0.91
	FR27	10.32	16.58	0.83	0.90
	FR28	10.63	16.94	0.81	0.90
	FR29	10.67	16.69	0.79	0.91
(FEJ-4) 0.819	FJ5	14.26	10.49	0.51	0.81
	FJ6	14.20	9.55	0.62	0.78
	FE7	14.00	9.56	0.63	0.78
	FE8	14.19	9.47	0.62	0.78
	FE9	14.31	9.17	0.66	0.77
(FJ-5) 0.800	FJ1	9.23	5.21	0.67	0.72
	FJ2	9.51	5.09	0.58	0.77
	FJ3	8.97	5.57	0.58	0.77
	FJ4	9.29	5.10	0.63	0.74

Source: Author

The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) confirmed that the theoretical structure of the five information categories-originally proposed during the scale design phase-aligns well with the actual information reception behavior of university students. The fact that observed items clearly loaded onto distinct factors, without cross-loading, provides strong evidence for both discriminant validity and construct validity. This finding reinforces the scientific rigor and practical applicability of the scale in future research on social media information access.

Taken together, the five-factor structure of the Facebook Information Access Scale suggests that students were still able to distinguish among different types of information based on communicative purpose, source cues, and content boundaries. This result is consistent with the view that Facebook, despite algorithmic distribution, continues to provide users with relatively visible contextual indicators such as page identity, textual captions, shared links, comments, and interaction patterns. These features may help students differentiate journalistic news, entertainment, advertising-PR, propaganda-oriented content, and raw information when accessing information on the platform.

3.2 Reliability and Construct Validity Analysis Results of the TikTok Information Access Scale

For the TikTok Information Access Scale, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.94, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$), confirming the appropriateness of the factor analysis model (see Table 6).

Table 6. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Results of the TikTok Information Access Scale

Indicator	Value
KMO	0.94
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Sig. < 0.05

Source: Author

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for the TikTok Information Access Scale was conducted in three rounds of item

elimination to refine the model and ensure structural accuracy. Across these three rounds, a total of nine items (items 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, and 24) were removed due to low factor loadings or cross-loadings. More specifically, these items were removed because they either failed to reach the minimum loading threshold of 0.40, loaded simultaneously on more than one factor, or did not show sufficient conceptual coherence with the final three-factor structure. The removal process therefore followed both statistical and substantive criteria. The final results revealed a three-factor solution, explaining a cumulative variance of 75.84% (see Table 7).

Table 7. Extracted Factors and Explained Variance

Factor	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Variance (%)	Cumulative Variance (%)
Factor 1	11.74	58.69	58.69
Factor 2	1.99	9.95	68.64
Factor 3	1.44	7.20	75.84

Source: Author

Factor 1 represents the merged category of “Raw Information and Advertising-PR” (TRA-1), comprising 7 items (TR25-TR29, TA17-TA18), with factor loadings ranging from 0.631 to 0.867. Notably, this factor consolidates two theoretically distinct categories—raw information and advertising-PR—into a single empirical construct. This convergence reflects the blended nature of content on TikTok, where promotional materials and unverified information are frequently intertwined and presented through entertaining videos, livestream sales, or controversial statements by influencers and KOLs. The lack of transparency and identifiable sources often leads users to perceive these two content types as a unified category, unlike on more traditional platforms such as newspapers or even Facebook, where clearer boundaries tend to be maintained.

Factor 2 corresponds to the category of “Mass Entertainment” (TEJ-2), consisting of 6 items (TE7-TE9, TE11, TE13, TJ6), with factor loadings ranging from 0.606 to 0.830. This factor captures content types such as humor, music, fashion, pets, and everyday life topics. These forms of content are highly representative of TikTok, a platform inherently designed for short-form entertainment and instant engagement. The convergence of entertainment and lifestyle content into a single factor illustrates a key characteristic of TikTok users’ information consumption habits: a focus on amusement rather than categorical differentiation. Unlike traditional media formats, TikTok’s content landscape encourages users to engage with emotionally stimulating, visually appealing material without clear boundaries between genres.

Factor 3 represents the group “News and Propaganda” (TJP-3), consisting of seven items (TJ1-TJ5, TP20, TP23), with factor loadings ranging from 0.533 to 0.848. This factor integrates videos that deliver mainstream news content with those aimed at policy promotion, cultural messaging, or anti-misinformation advocacy. The convergence of these items suggests that TikTok users tend not to differentiate clearly between legitimate news and propaganda-oriented content, as both are commonly presented in short-form, visually engaging formats, using similar delivery techniques such as narration, voice-over, background music, and captioning. As a result, content originally designed for educational or socially constructive purposes is frequently consumed in a rapid, surface-level manner, similar to how users engage with quick news updates, rather than being critically processed or reflected upon.

Although nine items were removed from the TikTok scale, this should not be interpreted as a weakness of the measurement design. Rather, the removal process shows that some theoretically distinct content categories did not remain empirically separable in the TikTok environment. This pattern is consistent with the platform’s content ecology, where news, entertainment, advertising, advocacy, and raw information are frequently presented through similar audiovisual conventions. The final three-factor solution was therefore retained because it demonstrated stronger statistical coherence and better reflected users’ actual perception of TikTok information.

Table 8. Construct Validity Results from Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of the TikTok Information Access Scale

Observed Variables	Factor		
	TRA-1	TEJ-2	TJP-3
TR29	.867		
TR27	.865		
TR28	.859		
TR25	.839		
TR26	.813		
TA18	.661		
TA17	.631		
TE8		.830	
TE9		.820	
TE7		.796	
TJ6		.690	
TE11		.663	
TE13		.606	
TJ1			.848
TJ2			.816
TJ4			.797
TJ3			.785
TJ5			.646
TP20			.612
TP23			.533

Source: Author

To examine the internal consistency reliability of the factor groups identified through the EFA, the study calculated Cronbach's Alpha for each factor. The results indicate that all three factor groups achieved high Alpha coefficients, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, demonstrating strong internal reliability of the scale (Table 9).

Table 9. Internal Consistency Reliability Results (Cronbach's Alpha) of the TikTok Information Access Scale

Overall Cronbach's Alpha	Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
(TRA-1) 0.950	TR25	15.63	44.91	0.87	0.94
	TR26	15.60	44.94	0.85	0.94
	TR27	15.60	44.47	0.87	0.94
	TR28	15.78	44.91	0.86	0.94
	TR29	15.80	44.65	0.86	0.94
	TA17	15.56	47.68	0.74	0.95
	TA18	15.48	46.64	0.76	0.95
(TEJ-2) 0.919	TJ6	16.19	28.67	0.77	0.90
	TE7	15.97	28.68	0.76	0.91
	TE8	16.08	28.22	0.79	0.90
	TE9	16.17	27.76	0.84	0.90
	TE11	16.34	28.35	0.75	0.91
	TE13	16.37	28.60	0.72	0.91
	TJ1	17.62	36.31	0.79	0.92
(TJP-3) 0.934	TJ2	17.81	37.01	0.76	0.93
	TJ3	17.52	36.02	0.83	0.92
	TJ4	17.58	35.99	0.84	0.92
	TJ5	17.42	36.84	0.78	0.92
	TP20	17.55	36.58	0.78	0.93
	TP23	17.58	36.95	0.73	0.93

Source: Author

A particularly noteworthy finding is that the original theoretical model comprising five information categories—namely journalism, entertainment, advertising, PR, propaganda, and raw information—was not retained. Through three rounds of item elimination (with nine items removed), the final EFA results extracted only three stable factors. In contrast, the three-factor structure of the TikTok Information Access Scale indicates a more platform-specific pattern of information reception. The merging of theoretically distinct content categories suggests that students may perceive TikTok information less through traditional communicative purposes and more through short-video format, emotional appeal, visual presentation, and algorithmically curated exposure. This finding reflects the role of TikTok's recommendation-driven environment in blurring boundaries among information types and shaping users' passive, rapid, and experience-oriented information access behavior.

To provide a clearer comparison between the two platform-specific scales, Figure 1 summarizes the final factor structures of the Facebook and TikTok Information Access Scales. The table highlights that the Facebook scale retained the original five-factor structure, whereas the TikTok scale converged into three broader empirical factors.

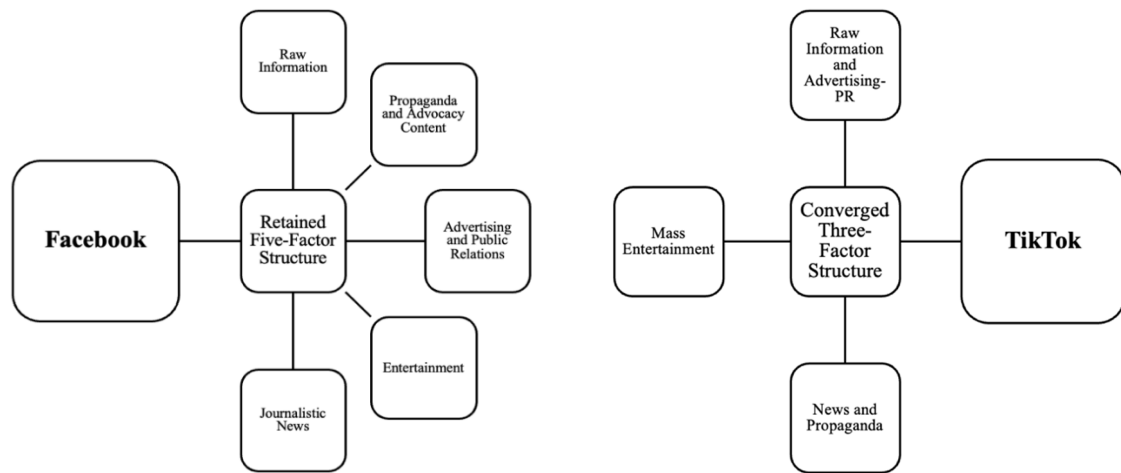


Figure 1. Comparison of Factor Structures for Information Access Scales on Facebook and TikTok. Source: Author

As shown in Figure 1, the Facebook scale remained closely aligned with the original content-based classification framework. In contrast, the TikTok scale reflected a platform-specific restructuring of information categories, in which raw information merged with advertising-PR, and news content merged with propaganda-oriented information. This visual comparison strengthens the interpretation that information access on social media should be examined in relation to platform architecture, recommendation systems, and user reception behavior.

4. Discussion

4.1 Discussion of the Validation Results of the Facebook Information Access Scale

The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and internal consistency assessment indicate that the Facebook Information Access Scale demonstrates a high level of alignment with the initial theoretical structure while meeting established standards for construct validity and reliability. The KMO value reached 0.94, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded statistically significant results, and the five extracted factors accounted for a cumulative variance of 68.78%, surpassing the recommended threshold of 60% for social science research (Hair et al., 2019). This suggests that the underlying structure of the data can be effectively modeled using the five-factor framework.

More importantly, the retention of the five-factor structure on Facebook suggests that students are still able to classify information according to communicative purpose, source cues, and content boundaries. This finding can be interpreted in relation to previous studies on Facebook's algorithmic News Feed. Devito (2016) argues that Facebook's content selection is not neutral but shaped by algorithmic values such as engagement, relevance, recency, and social connection (Devito, 2016). However, compared with short-video platforms, Facebook still provides relatively visible contextual indicators, including page identity, shared links, textual captions, comments, and source familiarity. These indicators may help users distinguish journalistic news, entertainment, advertising-PR, propaganda-oriented content, and raw information.

This interpretation is also consistent with Bucher's (2017) concept of the "algorithmic imaginary," which emphasizes that users develop practical understandings of how platform algorithms work through everyday experience (Bucher, 2017). In the present study, the fact that Facebook items loaded clearly onto five separate factors suggests that students may have developed a degree of platform literacy through repeated exposure to different content formats. They may not fully understand how the Facebook algorithm technically operates, but they appear to recognize the social and communicative cues attached to different types of information.

First, the "advertising-PR" information group demonstrates both diversity and consistency in user perception, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.919. As social media increasingly becomes a primary platform for digital marketing, previous studies have also reported a growing trend in user exposure to commercial content on Facebook, including marketing activities by KOLs, livestream sales, and brand-generated content (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lee & Hong, 2016). From the perspective of algorithmic distribution, the strong coherence of this factor may also reflect the visibility of promotional cues on Facebook, where sponsored posts, brand pages, influencer content, and sales livestreams are often

recognizable through format, wording, and interaction patterns.

Second, the “raw information” group, with high factor loadings ranging from 0.803 to 0.837, reflects strong consistency in how users identify unverified content, often characterized by sensationalism and viral appeal. Numerous studies have shown that such content tends to spread rapidly on social media and erodes users’ ability to distinguish between true and false information (Friggeri et al., 2014; Gordon Pennycook et al., 2020). This result may also be connected to the feedback loop between social drivers and algorithmic mechanisms described by Metzler & Garcia (2024), in which user engagement and platform recommendation systems mutually reinforce the visibility of emotionally charged or controversial content (Metzler & Garcia, 2024). Thus, students’ recognition of raw information as a separate factor may reflect their exposure to highly engaging but weakly verified content in the Facebook environment.

Third, the “entertainment” group underscores the central role of leisure-related content in Facebook usage, particularly among younger users. Elements such as music, fashion, sports, and humorous content are dominant in sustaining engagement on the platform (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Tandoc et al., 2015). The group’s Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.874 indicates a high level of internal consistency within the scale.

Fourth, the “propaganda” group, while diverse in content, maintained a stable structure with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.819. The presence of messages related to public policy, social values, and civic behavior is consistent with prior research on the role of social media in public governance and civic mobilization (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Tufekci, 2017). Although one item (FJ5) had a relatively low factor loading (0.511), the group still meets the standards for quantitative research.

Finally, the “Journalistic News” group, with factor loadings ranging from 0.646 to 0.801 and a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.800, suggests that university students continue to demonstrate the ability to distinguish mainstream journalism from other forms of content amidst the noise of the digital information environment. This finding supports Tandoc et al.’s (2017) observation that social media users still rely on structural cues and source credibility to assess the reliability of information (Tandoc et al., 2017). It also corresponds with Swart’s (2021) argument that young users’ engagement with algorithmically curated news depends on their everyday experience with platform cues, perceived relevance, and trust (Swart, 2021).

Overall, the Facebook results show that although algorithmic curation shapes what users see, it does not necessarily eliminate users’ ability to classify information by content type. Rather, Facebook appears to represent a hybrid environment in which algorithmic distribution coexists with visible source cues and textual context. This helps explain why the original five-category theoretical model was empirically retained in the Facebook scale. Therefore, the EFA results not only confirm the construct validity and discriminant validity of the scale but also indicate that content-based classification remains meaningful for studying information access on Facebook.

4.2 Discussion of the Validation Results of the TikTok Information Access Scale

The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Cronbach’s Alpha reliability testing indicate that the TikTok Information Access Scale did not retain the original theoretical structure of five content categories. Instead, the items converged into three new factors, with a total variance explained of 75.84%—a notably high percentage for social science research (Hair et al., 2019). This change should not be viewed as a methodological failure but rather as a reflection of the fundamental differences in how users receive information on TikTok: a platform driven by algorithmic recommendation, short-video affordances, rapid scrolling, emotional stimulation, and personalized content flow.

This finding is strongly aligned with recent literature on TikTok and algorithmic user behavior. Bhandari and Bimo (2022) argue that TikTok represents an “algorithmized” social media environment in which users’ self-expression and content discovery are deeply shaped by platform recommendation systems (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Unlike Facebook, where users often encounter content through friendship networks, pages, groups, and shared links, TikTok relies heavily on a personalized feed that continuously delivers content based on prior engagement signals. Zannettou et al. (2024), using data donations from 347 TikTok users and millions of video recommendations, found that users’ average daily usage time increased over their lifetime on the platform, highlighting the capacity of short-video recommendation systems to sustain habitual engagement (Zannettou et al., 2024). This helps explain why students in the present study classified TikTok information less according to traditional content categories and more according to format, affective appeal, and algorithmically curated experience.

Factor 1: Misinformation & Advertising

The convergence of advertising/PR content and raw information into a single factor suggests that TikTok users do not clearly distinguish between these two types of content. Sales videos, KOL-sponsored content, controversial personal statements, livestream selling, and unverified claims are often presented in the same format: short, visually striking, emotionally appealing, and optimized for quick engagement. This result is consistent with Bahiyah Omar and Wang Dequan’s (2020) finding that TikTok use is strongly associated with watching, sharing, and creating content based on user motivation and personality traits (Bahiyah Omar & Wang Dequan, 2020).

From an algorithmic perspective, this factor reflects the way TikTok's recommendation system may prioritize engagement signals over communicative intent. Metzler et al. (2024) emphasize that algorithmic mechanisms and social drivers on digital media form feedback loops, making it difficult to separate platform effects from user behavior (Metzler & Garcia, 2024). In this study, the merging of raw information and advertising-PR suggests that students may experience these contents as a unified category because both are attention-grabbing, persuasive, weakly source-transparent, and frequently circulated through similar engagement pathways. Thus, TikTok does not merely distribute these contents; it may also reshape how users perceive their boundaries.

Factor 2: Entertainment and Everyday Life

The second factor, "Mass Entertainment," reflects the defining characteristic of TikTok as a platform for short-form entertainment and affective engagement. Users tend not to differentiate between entertainment content, lifestyle content, pets, fashion, music, humor, or everyday-life videos because these are consumed through similar viewing practices. This supports Anderson's (2020) observation that TikTok is organized around quick, mobile, and visually engaging forms of content consumption (Anderson, 2020).

This result can also be interpreted through the lens of user behavior. TikTok users often engage in continuous scrolling, responding to content through immediate affective reactions rather than deliberate evaluation. Swart (2021) shows that young people's engagement with algorithmically curated content is shaped by perceived relevance, emotion, and everyday routines (Swart, 2021). Similarly, the present study suggests that students' TikTok information access is organized around ease of consumption, emotional stimulation, entertainment value, and shareability rather than clear informational categories.

The convergence of entertainment and everyday-life items also reflects the role of platform affordances. On TikTok, the same technical features—short duration, music, filters, captions, remixing, hashtags, and recommendation-based visibility—are applied across different types of content. As a result, the distinction between "information" and "entertainment" becomes less stable. This supports the broader argument that platform design shapes not only what users see but also how users process and categorize what they see.

Factor 3: News and Propagandistic Information

The convergence of mainstream journalism and propaganda-oriented content into a single factor is one of the most theoretically significant findings of this study. In traditional communication theory, these two content types differ fundamentally: journalism aims to inform the public based on verification and public interest, while propaganda or advocacy-oriented content seeks to persuade, mobilize, or shape attitudes. However, on TikTok, both are commonly delivered through similar short-video conventions: narration, captions, background music, emotional framing, influencers, rapid editing, and simplified storytelling.

This finding is consistent with studies on politainment and soft propaganda. Cervi et al. (2023) argue that TikTok has become an important site where political communication is increasingly blended with entertainment (Cervi et al., 2023). Medina Serrano et al. (2020) similarly show that political communication on TikTok often adopts popular cultural forms to reach audiences (Medina Serrano et al., 2020). Zhao and Zhang (2024) further demonstrate that visual propaganda on Douyin can be presented through attractive audiovisual formats, making political or institutional messages resemble ordinary popular videos (Zhao & Zhang, 2024).

The present study contributes to this literature by showing that such blending is not only a matter of content production but also a matter of user perception. Students did not perceive news and propaganda-oriented content as fully distinct categories; instead, these items converged into one factor. This suggests that TikTok's algorithmic and audiovisual environment may reduce the salience of communicative intent while increasing the importance of format, emotion, and perceived relevance.

Taken together, the three-factor structure of the TikTok scale indicates a shift from content-based classification to experience-based classification. While the Facebook scale retained the five theoretical categories, the TikTok scale reorganized information around platform-specific modes of exposure: persuasive and weakly verified content, entertainment-oriented everyday content, and news-propaganda hybrid content. This supports Nieborg and Poell's (2018) argument that platformization reshapes cultural production and circulation. It also extends this argument to the level of information reception by showing that platform logic may reshape not only content distribution but also users' cognitive categorization of information (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

This suggests that future research on information reception behavior on TikTok should shift theoretical models away from content-based classifications (e.g., "news-entertainment-advertising") and toward format- and emotion-based frameworks. Maintaining traditional content taxonomies may no longer be appropriate in a digital media environment shaped by algorithmic curation and visually driven user engagement.

Therefore, the divergence from the original theoretical structure should not be interpreted as a weakness of the TikTok scale. Instead, it reveals a key feature of contemporary social media behavior: users' perception of information is increasingly shaped by algorithmic curation, short-video affordances, affective engagement, and passive exposure. For future research, this suggests that measurement tools for TikTok should not rely exclusively on traditional content taxonomies such as journalism, entertainment, advertising, propaganda, and raw information. They should also incorporate platform-specific dimensions such as algorithmic exposure, perceived personalization, emotional intensity, source ambiguity, and format-driven engagement.

Overall, the comparison between Facebook and TikTok demonstrates that social media information access is platform-specific. Facebook users in this study appeared to classify information mainly through source cues and content boundaries, whereas TikTok users appeared to classify information through algorithmically curated experience, visual format, and emotional salience. This distinction helps clarify the theoretical contribution of the study: information access on social media should not be understood only as exposure to different content types, but also as a process shaped by platform architecture, recommendation systems, and habitual user behavior.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted only among students from Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City. Although the sample was stratified by member university and reached an adequate size for EFA, it does not fully represent university students across all regions, institutional types, or socio-cultural contexts in Vietnam. Future studies should validate the scales with broader samples, including students from public and private universities, institutions outside Ho Chi Minh City, and universities in different regions of Vietnam. Cross-regional and cross-cultural replication would also be necessary to examine whether the Facebook and TikTok factor structures are stable beyond the VNU-HCM context.

Second, the study used a cross-sectional survey design, with data collected at a single point in time. As a result, the findings reflect students' reported information access patterns during the data collection period but cannot capture changes in social media behavior over time. The cross-sectional design also prevents causal interpretation. For example, the study can identify the factor structure and reliability of the scales, but it cannot determine whether exposure to certain types of information leads to changes in academic performance, psychological well-being, media literacy, or political attitudes.

Third, the study relied on self-reported data. Students' responses may be influenced by recall bias, subjective interpretation of content categories, or social desirability. This limitation is especially relevant for TikTok, where users often encounter information passively through algorithmic recommendation and may not always consciously classify content types. Future studies could combine survey data with digital trace data, content analysis, diary methods, or longitudinal designs to examine how information access patterns evolve over time and how they relate to student outcomes.

Finally, future studies should apply Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to further validate the scales and examine the relationships between information access, academic performance, critical thinking, media literacy, and psychological well-being.

5. Conclusion

This study developed and preliminarily validated two platform-specific scales for measuring university students' access to different types of information on Facebook and TikTok in the Vietnamese context. Based on survey data from 410 students at Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, both scales demonstrated acceptable reliability and construct validity. The Facebook Information Access Scale retained the original five-factor structure, including journalistic news, entertainment, advertising and public relations, propaganda or orientation-oriented content, and raw or unverified information. In contrast, the TikTok Information Access Scale converged into three empirical factors: raw information combined with advertising-PR, mass entertainment, and news combined with propaganda-oriented information. This difference suggests that while Facebook users may still classify information based on source cues and communicative purposes, TikTok users' information reception is more strongly shaped by short-video format, emotional appeal, visual presentation, and algorithmically curated exposure.

The study contributes to social media research by offering measurement tools that go beyond general indicators of social media use, attitudes, or media literacy, focusing instead on the specific types of information students access across different platform environments. The findings also highlight the need for media literacy education to address platform-specific information dynamics, especially algorithmic recommendation and content blending on TikTok. However, the study is limited by its sample of students from one university system and its reliance on self-reported, cross-sectional data. Future research should validate the scales with broader samples and apply Confirmatory Factor Analysis or Structural Equation Modeling to examine how different types of information access relate to media literacy, critical thinking, academic performance, psychological well-being, and civic engagement.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in full compliance with the ethical standards set by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. Participants' rights were carefully protected throughout the data collection process, with informed consent obtained prior to participation. All involvement was entirely voluntary, and strict confidentiality was maintained. No procedures posed any risk to participants, and all collected data were used exclusively for scholarly purposes.

Scale Use Note

Researchers interested in using the original scale are requested to contact the author of this article for permission and further information.

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Author contributions

The author was solely responsible for the conceptualization, study design, literature review, questionnaire development, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the results, manuscript drafting, and revision. The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

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The author declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Obtained.

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The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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