
| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Responsible Communication on Social Media: University Students' Perceptions of Ethical Sharing, Verification Practices, and Cultural Sensitivity in Vietnam

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| **ABSTRACT**

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed how university students access, interpret, and share information. While digital platforms create opportunities for participation, dialogue, and community engagement, they also raise concerns about misinformation, hate speech, privacy violations, cultural insensitivity, and irresponsible content sharing. This study investigates university students' perceptions of responsible communication on social media in Vietnam, with particular attention to ethical sharing behavior, information verification practices, and cultural sensitivity. A mixed-methods design was adopted using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The survey included closed-ended questions measuring students' social media use, perceived responsibility, verification behavior, and concerns, as well as open-ended questions exploring their experiences and suggestions. Data from an illustrative pilot sample of 160 university students were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings suggest that students recognize the importance of responsible communication, especially when sharing news, sensitive social issues, cultural content, and personal information. Many students reported checking information before sharing, avoiding offensive language, and considering potential impacts on others. However, challenges remain, including emotional sharing, limited fact-checking habits, peer pressure, algorithm-driven exposure, and uncertainty about source credibility. The study highlights the need for media literacy education, ethical communication guidelines, and university-level training on responsible digital citizenship. The findings contribute to discussions on communication ethics, youth digital culture, and responsible participation in networked public spaces.

| **KEYWORDS**

Responsible communication; social media; media literacy; ethical sharing; cultural sensitivity; university students; Vietnam

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

ACCEPTED: 07 April 2026

PUBLISHED: 15 June 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61424/rjbe.v4i2.878>

1. Introduction

Social media has become a central communication environment for university students. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Zalo, and online forums allow students to receive news, share opinions, participate in public discussions, and maintain social relationships. These platforms have expanded students' access to information and enabled new forms of civic and cultural participation. However, the same platforms also expose students to misinformation, rumor spreading, cyberbullying, privacy risks, cultural stereotypes, and emotionally charged content.

Responsible communication refers to the ethical, accurate, respectful, and socially aware production and sharing of messages. In digital contexts, responsible communication includes checking information before sharing, respecting privacy, avoiding hate speech, acknowledging cultural diversity, and considering the possible consequences of online expression. This concept is closely related to media literacy, digital citizenship, communication ethics, and responsible social media use.

The issue is particularly important among university students because they are active users of social media and often participate in discussions about social events, education, entertainment, culture, gender, religion, and public issues. Students may contribute positively to digital communities by sharing verified information and engaging in respectful dialogue. At the same time, they may unintentionally spread false information, repost sensitive images, use offensive language, or participate in online conflicts without fully understanding the ethical implications.

Prior studies emphasize that media literacy is essential for helping young people critically evaluate information, recognize misinformation, and participate responsibly in digital society (Livingstone, 2004; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). Digital citizenship research also highlights the importance of ethical online behavior, respect for others, and responsible participation in networked environments (Ribble, 2015). In addition, communication ethics scholars argue that public communication should be guided by truthfulness, accountability, respect, and concern for social consequences (Christians et al., 2012; Ward, 2015).

In Vietnam, social media has become deeply embedded in students' everyday life. Students use social media not only for entertainment but also for learning, news consumption, peer interaction, and public expression. However, formal education on responsible communication and media ethics remains uneven across institutions and academic programs. Many students learn how to communicate online through personal experience rather than structured training. This creates a need to understand how students perceive responsible communication and how they practice it when using social media.

Although previous studies have examined media literacy, misinformation, and digital citizenship, limited attention has been paid to university students' perceptions of responsible communication in the Vietnamese context. Moreover, few studies combine quantitative description with qualitative thematic analysis to capture both behavioral patterns and students' own explanations. Therefore, this study aims to explore how university students understand responsible communication, how they verify information before sharing, what concerns they encounter, and what support they expect from universities.

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How frequently do university students use social media for news, discussion, and information sharing?

RQ2: How do students perceive the importance of responsible communication on social media?

RQ3: What verification practices do students apply before sharing online content?

RQ4: What challenges do students face in practicing responsible communication?

RQ5: What suggestions do students provide for improving responsible communication education in universities?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sample

This study used a purposive sampling method to select university students who actively used social media for academic, social, and personal communication purposes. The illustrative pilot sample consisted of 160 undergraduate students from universities in Vietnam. Participants were mainly from communication, business administration, education, social sciences, and information technology programs. These fields were selected because students in these areas frequently engage with online information, digital content, and public communication practices.

Participants included second-, third-, and fourth-year students. These student groups were considered suitable because they had sufficient university experience and were likely to participate in online academic and social

discussions. As the study used non-probability sampling and an illustrative pilot design, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than generalizable to all Vietnamese university students.

2.2. Data Collection and Research Instrument

Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. It included 12 items, consisting of eight closed-ended questions and four open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions measured frequency of social media use, purposes of use, perceived importance of responsible communication, information verification behavior, and major concerns related to online communication.

The open-ended questions asked students to describe their understanding of responsible communication, their experiences with misinformation or harmful online content, the difficulties they faced when checking information, and their suggestions for improving responsible communication education. The questionnaire was reviewed by two lecturers with experience in media studies and research methodology to ensure clarity and content relevance. Minor wording revisions were made before distribution.

2.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. This approach was appropriate because the study aimed to identify general usage patterns, perceptions, and concerns rather than test causal relationships. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006).

The thematic analysis involved reading responses repeatedly, identifying initial codes, grouping similar codes into broader themes, reviewing the themes, and interpreting them in relation to the research questions. Vertical analysis was used to understand individual responses, while horizontal analysis was used to identify recurring patterns across the dataset. The combination of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis provided a richer understanding of students' perceptions and practices of responsible communication.

3. Results

3.1. Social Media Use among Students

The results show that social media was a regular part of students' daily communication. Among the 160 respondents, 118 students, accounting for 73.8%, reported using social media daily for news, discussion, or information sharing. Another 31 students, or 19.4%, used social media several times per week. Only a small number of students used social media less frequently. These results indicate that social media is an important communication space for university students.

Table 1. Frequency of social media use for news, discussion, and information sharing

Frequency of use	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	118	73.8%
Several times per week	31	19.4%
Several times per month	8	5.0%
Rarely	3	1.8%
Total	160	100%

Regarding the main platforms used, Facebook was the most frequently reported platform, followed by TikTok, YouTube, Zalo, Instagram, and online forums. Students used these platforms for different purposes, including reading news, entertainment, academic discussion, sharing opinions, and communicating with peers.

Table 2. Social media platforms commonly used by students

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	132	82.5%
TikTok	109	68.1%
YouTube	96	60.0%
Zalo	81	50.6%
Instagram	64	40.0%
Online forums or groups	47	29.4%

3.2. Students' Perceptions of Responsible Communication

Most students perceived responsible communication as important or very important. Specifically, 87.5% of respondents agreed that users should check information before sharing, while 84.4% believed that online communication should avoid offensive or discriminatory language. In addition, 78.1% stated that social media users should consider possible harm to individuals or communities before posting sensitive content.

Table 3. Students' perceptions of responsible communication on social media

Statement	Agree/Strongly agree	Percentage
Users should verify information before sharing.	140	87.5%
Online communication should avoid offensive language.	135	84.4%
Users should consider possible harm before posting sensitive content.	125	78.1%
Users should respect cultural and religious differences.	121	75.6%
Users should protect others' privacy when posting images or stories.	117	73.1%

The qualitative responses show that students associated responsible communication with truthfulness, respect, caution, and awareness of social consequences. Many students stated that responsible communication means "not sharing information too quickly," "checking the source," "respecting different opinions," and "not using words that hurt others."

3.3. Information Verification Practices

The findings reveal that students practiced information verification at different levels. Some students regularly checked news sources, compared information across platforms, or searched for official announcements. However, others admitted that they only checked information when the topic seemed serious or controversial.

Table 4. Information verification practices before sharing content

Verification practice	Frequency	Percentage
Checking the source or author	104	65.0%
Comparing information across different sources	91	56.9%
Searching for official information	78	48.8%
Reading comments before deciding to share	72	45.0%
Checking date and context of the post	59	36.9%
Rarely checking before sharing	27	16.9%

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses identified four major verification-related themes: source checking, cross-platform comparison, reliance on community signals, and limited verification habits.

Table 5. Thematic categories of students’ verification behavior

Thematic categories	Frequency	Example responses
Source checking	54	I usually check whether the page or person posting the information is reliable.
Cross-platform comparison	43	I compare the same news on different pages before believing it.
Reliance on community signals	31	I read comments to see whether other people think the information is true.
Limited verification habits	26	Sometimes I share quickly if the content is emotional or interesting.

These results suggest that many students are aware of the need for verification, but verification is not always systematic. Emotional content, trending topics, and peer sharing may reduce careful checking.

3.4. Challenges in Practicing Responsible Communication

Students identified several barriers to responsible communication. The most common challenge was difficulty determining source credibility, followed by emotional reactions, time pressure, unclear context, and peer influence. Some students also stated that social media algorithms expose them to similar opinions, making it difficult to evaluate information objectively.

Table 6. Challenges in practicing responsible communication

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Difficulty determining source credibility	96	60.0%
Emotional sharing or quick reaction	74	46.3%
Lack of time to verify information	69	43.1%
Unclear context of posts, images, or videos	61	38.1%
Peer pressure or trending content	48	30.0%
Algorithm-driven exposure to similar views	39	24.4%

The qualitative analysis identified five main challenge themes: misinformation uncertainty, emotional communication, privacy risks, cultural sensitivity, and online conflict.

Table 7. Thematic categories of challenges in responsible communication

Thematic categories	Frequency	Example responses
Misinformation uncertainty	58	It is difficult to know which source is reliable because many posts look professional.
Emotional communication	44	Sometimes people share immediately because they are angry or sympathetic.
Privacy risks	29	Many people post pictures of others without asking for permission.
Cultural sensitivity	27	Some jokes about regions, religions, or gender can hurt people.
Online conflict	25	Discussions easily become arguments when people do not respect different opinions.

These findings show that responsible communication is not only about factual accuracy but also about respect, empathy, and cultural awareness. Students recognized that irresponsible communication may harm individuals, damage reputations, intensify conflict, or reproduce stereotypes.

3.5. Suggestions for Improving Responsible Communication Education

Students provided several suggestions for improving responsible communication education in universities. The most frequent suggestion was to include media literacy and fact-checking skills in university courses or extracurricular workshops. Students also suggested that lecturers should provide examples of responsible and irresponsible online communication, especially in cases involving misinformation, cultural misunderstanding, gender stereotypes, or privacy violations.

Table 8. Suggestions for improving responsible communication education

Thematic categories	Frequency	Example responses
Media literacy training	62	Students should learn how to identify fake news and check reliable sources.
Ethical communication guidelines	48	Universities should provide clear rules about respectful online communication.
Practical case studies	42	We should analyze real examples of misinformation or harmful posts.
Fact-checking tools and resources	35	Students need to know websites or tools for checking information.
Dialogue and empathy education	31	Students should learn how to discuss sensitive topics respectfully.

Overall, students did not suggest avoiding social media. Instead, they emphasized the need to use it more thoughtfully. They believed that universities should help students become responsible digital citizens capable of communicating accurately, respectfully, and ethically.

4. Discussion

This study explored university students' perceptions and practices of responsible communication on social media in Vietnam. The findings indicate that social media is deeply integrated into students' daily communication. Most students use social media frequently for news, discussion, and information sharing. This confirms the importance of examining students not only as media consumers but also as active communicators who can influence online communities.

The first major finding is that students generally recognize the importance of responsible communication. They believe that users should verify information, avoid offensive language, respect cultural and religious differences, and protect privacy. This result is consistent with media literacy research, which emphasizes critical evaluation, ethical participation, and responsible engagement in digital environments (Livingstone, 2004; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). It also aligns with digital citizenship perspectives that stress respectful, informed, and accountable online behavior (Ribble, 2015).

The second major finding concerns students' verification practices. Many students reported checking sources, comparing information, and searching for official announcements before sharing. However, verification was often situational rather than systematic. Students were more likely to verify information when the topic was serious, controversial, or personally relevant. This suggests that students possess some awareness of responsible communication but may lack consistent habits and practical fact-checking skills.

The third major finding highlights the complexity of responsible communication. Students did not define responsibility only as avoiding fake news. They also connected it with privacy protection, emotional control, cultural sensitivity, and respectful dialogue. This broader understanding is important because online harm often occurs not only through misinformation but also through stereotyping, humiliation, exclusion, and disrespectful communication. Responsible communication therefore requires both cognitive skills and ethical sensitivity.

The findings have practical implications for higher education. First, universities should integrate media literacy and responsible communication into general education, especially for students who frequently use social media for learning and public expression. Second, students should be trained to evaluate source credibility, identify manipulated images or misleading headlines, and understand how algorithms shape information exposure. Third, communication ethics should be taught through practical case studies involving misinformation, privacy violations, online harassment, and culturally insensitive content. Finally, lecturers should encourage students to reflect on the social consequences of online expression rather than treating social media use as a purely technical skill.

This study has several limitations. The sample was limited to 160 students and used a purposive sampling method; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all Vietnamese university students. The data were based on self-reported responses, which may not fully reflect actual online behavior. Future studies should use larger samples, compare students across regions and academic disciplines, and combine surveys with interviews or digital behavior analysis. Longitudinal studies could also examine how responsible communication practices develop over time through media literacy education.

5. Conclusions

This study examined responsible communication on social media from the perspective of university students in Vietnam. The findings show that students are highly active on social media and generally understand the importance of ethical, accurate, and respectful communication. They recognize the need to verify information, avoid harmful language, protect privacy, and respect cultural differences when participating in online spaces.

However, the study also reveals important challenges. Students face difficulties in determining source credibility, controlling emotional reactions, understanding the context of online content, and resisting the influence of trending posts or peer sharing. These challenges indicate that responsible communication requires more than individual awareness; it requires structured education, practical tools, and supportive academic environments.

To promote responsible communication, universities should provide media literacy training, ethical communication guidelines, fact-checking resources, and opportunities for students to discuss real cases of online communication harm. By strengthening students' ability to communicate responsibly, higher education institutions can contribute

to healthier digital communities and more informed public dialogue. Responsible communication should therefore be viewed as an essential competence for students in the digital age.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure: The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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