INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

Vol. 6 No. 02 (2026)

e.ISSN: 2409-5222

https://ijictt.ictt.info

A Study on the Influencing Factors of Social Media Users' Conformity in Information Posting Behavior from the Perspective of Social Comparison Theory

An Nahui

School of Business and Trade, Southwest University, Chongqing 400715, China

Abstract

[Purpose/significance] *This study aims to clarify the driving factors and pathways underlying herd-posting (conformity information-posting) behavior among social media platform users, providing a basis for content-ecosystem governance, guidance of user-generated content, public-opinion monitoring, and recommendation-algorithm optimization.*

[Method/process] *Grounded in conformity theory, social comparison theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, this article treats social comparison factors and the platform and information environment as core independent variables and introduces positive affect, negative affect, and self-efficacy as parallel mediators to build a theoretical model. A questionnaire survey and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used to test the hypotheses and mediating effects.*

[Result/conclusion] *Both upward and downward social comparison tendencies significantly influence conformity information-posting behavior, mediated by positive affect, negative affect, and self-efficacy. Platform and information environment factors also significantly increase conformity posting, partially mediated by self-efficacy. Social media platforms should therefore appropriately guide social comparison contexts, attend to users' emotional experience and self-efficacy, and strengthen information credibility and risk management to promote healthy, orderly content production and dissemination.*

Keywords: *Social media; Conformity behavior; Information posting; Social comparison theory*

Introduction

Under the Web 2.0 paradigm, social media platforms have reconstructed information production and dissemination, turning users into “prosumers” who co-construct the content ecosystem rather than merely receiving information. In China, the deduplicated active-user scale and average monthly usage time of major new-media apps reached 1.149 billion and 3,367.5 minutes by October 2025, both rising year-on-year, underscoring social media's role as the core arena of social information interaction[1]. Social media's highly interconnected scenarios accentuate group-level characteristics in users' information behavior[2], and individuals in such community settings are readily influenced by group norms and peer pressure, producing conformity behavior—adjusting one's own cognition or behavior to

match the majority[3]. On social media, this manifests when users adjust their posting strategies to align with trending topics or highly interactive content[4]—for example, reposting content with high like counts or greater social influence to increase their own visibility[5]. Existing research has examined conformity in misinformation dissemination[6] and information-sharing[7], but has paid comparatively little attention to users' conformity decisions at the content-posting stage itself. This study therefore focuses on social media users' conformity information-posting behavior, asking which factors drive it and how it shapes users' expression and dissemination strategies. Social comparison theory offers a useful lens for this process: in the absence of objective standards, individuals evaluate their abilities, opinions, and status against others[8]. Social media's highly visualized, real-time interactive environment continuously exposes users to others' content performance (likes, reposts, comment tone), generating upward or downward comparison that shapes both self-perception and the tendency to imitate others' posting to gain recognition or avoid marginalization. Integrating social comparison theory with information behavior and communication research, this study builds a multidimensional model to answer: (1) do social media users show a significant conformity tendency when posting, and (2) which factors drive it?

1. Literature Review

1.1 Conformity Information Behavior in the Social Media Environment

Conformity behavior was first studied experimentally by Sherif, whose 1935 “autokinetic effect” experiments demonstrated informational conformity under uncertainty[9], and by Asch, whose line-judgment paradigm showed that normative group pressure can override even clear objective facts[10]. Together these established the informational and normative pathways of social influence that remain central to social psychology, and conformity today shapes everyday choices from dress to consumption to opinion expression, strengthening group cohesion while sometimes weakening independent thinking. With the rise of social media, conformity has extended into virtual spaces, where visible like, repost, and comment counts, combined with algorithmic recommendation, form a digitized “majority opinion” that intensifies susceptibility to others' influence. Studies of conformity reposting find that repost counts, network position, and blogger following positively predict users' own reposting[11], and that performance expectancy, social influence, and poster influence jointly trigger student reposting on Douyin, yielding several high-repost configurations[12]. Studies of conformity sharing find that subjective norms exert the strongest effect on information-sharing, with information-discrimination self-efficacy negatively moderating that effect[7]. Studies of conformity choice on learning platforms identify perceived benefit, user needs, social influence, and information encountering as direct pathways[13]. These studies collectively span reposting, sharing, and adoption, as well as group behavior during emergencies and search behavior on learning platforms, offering groundwork for probing conformity's triggers, pathways, and interventions on social media.

1.2 Research on Information-Posting Behavior on Social Media

Information-posting behavior is a core component of social media users' information behavior[14]. The openness and interactivity of social media let users post text, images, or video to express opinions, present their image, and interact with others. Existing research explains this behavior through individual motivations such as self-presentation, attention-seeking, and emotional gratification[15]; through external conditions such as recommendation algorithms, interaction mechanisms, and information popularity[16]; and through the Technology Acceptance Model, which highlights perceived usefulness and ease of use[17]. These studies mainly address external motivations and technological features, giving comparatively little attention to users' psychological processing when confronted with others' information—particularly the social comparison that inevitably arises amid information overload, and its relationship to conformity information-posting, which remains under-examined.

1.3 Research on and Application of Social Comparison Theory in Information Behavior

Social comparison theory holds that, absent an objective standard, individuals evaluate themselves by comparison with others who are better (upward), similar (lateral), or worse (downward)[8]. Festinger proposed upward comparison in 1954, arguing individuals are innately driven to compare themselves with superior others, with the resulting effect depending on whether the comparison matches the individual's own intent[8]; his "similarity hypothesis" underlies lateral comparison, since similar others provide more valid reference information[18]; and Hakmiller introduced downward comparison in 1966 as comparison with inferior others[19]. Originating in psychology, social comparison theory has since informed sociology, communication, and behavioral science, especially research on self-presentation, consumption, and emotion. On social media, users unconsciously make upward comparisons when viewing others' achievements and respond by highlighting their own strengths; they imitate similar others to maintain group consistency; and they post comparative content to highlight their own advantages when others appear inferior—an impulse amplified by visible like and repost counts. This process shapes information seeking (e.g., downward comparison can reduce the need to search by boosting self-worth[20]), usage behavior (upward and downward comparison predict burnout, unlike lateral comparison[21]), and posting behavior (upward-comparison content on Weibo deepens college students' ego depletion and promotes negative-information posting[22]). In sum, social comparison theory has been widely applied to information behavior, but existing work concentrates on psychological well-being and usage behavior, leaving its link to information-posting underexplored and mostly limited to direct effects—despite social comparison's evident capacity to trigger complex emotions and cognitive evaluations that may mediate this link. This study therefore surveys social media users to empirically examine the factors shaping conformity information-posting behavior and to build a corresponding theoretical model.

2. Theoretical Model and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, developed from Tolman's Stimulus–Response theory, holds that individuals do not react directly to external stimuli but instead process them through an intervening "organism" stage, highlighting the role of internal psychological states in shaping behavior[23]. This study treats emotion and self-efficacy as organism variables (O), examining how external stimuli (S) generate emotional experience and cognitive evaluation, and how this in turn shapes users' conformity information-posting behavior (R). Emotion is understood as a subjective evaluative response to a specific object or situation that guides behavioral tendencies, manifesting in affective experience, behavioral response, and physiological arousal; self-efficacy is an individual's judgment of their own capability to perform a given behavior, continuously shaped through interaction with situational cues. Together they form the key psychological transmission mechanism linking external stimuli to behavioral response.

2.2 Model Construction

Social comparison theory and SOR theory each explain users' information-posting behavior—through psychological motivation and technology acceptance, respectively—but no existing framework jointly integrates cognitive, psychological, and situational factors. Drawing on conformity theory, social comparison theory, and SOR theory, and incorporating both social comparison factors and platform/information-environment factors, this study constructs an integrated analytical framework, shown in Figure 1.

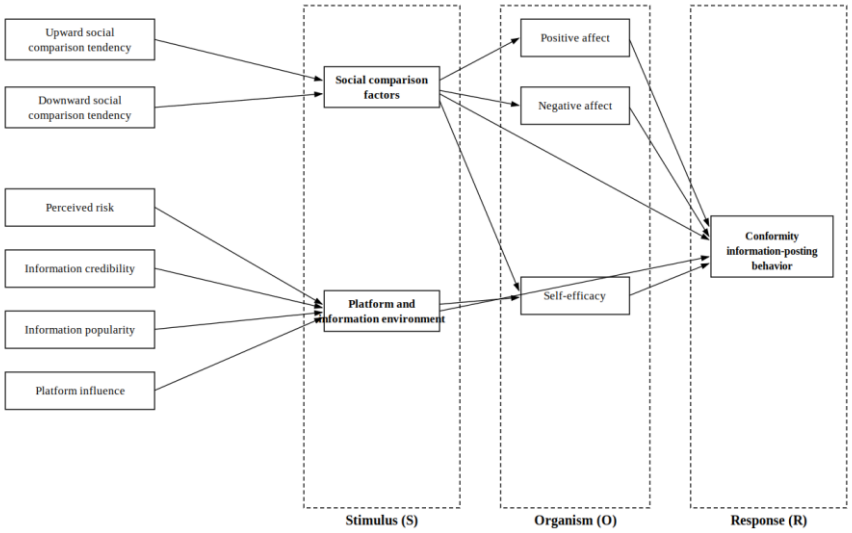


Figure 1. Model of Conformity Information-Posting Behavior from the Perspective of Social Comparison Theory

2.3 Research Hypotheses

Based on SOR theory, this study examines how external stimuli from two dimensions—social comparison and the platform information environment—shape users' emotional responses and conformity information-posting behavior. Six factors—upward and downward social comparison tendency, perceived risk, information credibility, information popularity, and platform influence—are integrated into two latent variables, "social comparison factors" and "platform and information environment assessment," and the following hypotheses are proposed.

(1) Social Comparison Factors and Emotion

Social comparison is continuously activated in social media's highly visualized environment and directly shapes users' emotional states[8]. Upward comparison tends to amplify perceived shortcomings, inducing anxiety and frustration, while downward comparison reinforces self-affirmation, evoking satisfaction and relaxation; such comparison-triggered emotion is an important psychological channel linking external information stimuli to behavioral decision-making[25]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H1a: Social comparison factors have a positive effect on users' negative affect.

H1b: Social comparison factors have a positive effect on users' positive affect.

(2) Social Comparison Factors and Self-Efficacy

Beyond emotion, social comparison also shapes self-efficacy. Upward comparison with better-performing others may undermine confidence and reduce self-efficacy, whereas downward comparison can enhance perceived competence through a "revealed-advantage" effect, altering users' self-evaluation and behavioral performance on social platforms[26]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H2: Social comparison factors have a positive effect on self-efficacy.

(3) Emotion and Conformity Information-Posting Behavior

Clore's affect-as-information hypothesis holds that emotion is itself an informational cue guiding decision-making[27]. Positive affect—pleasure, pride, interest, optimism—raises psychological energy and behavioral initiative, reinforcing users' desire for expression and the likelihood of posting and following others. Negative affect—anxiety, anger, fear, sadness—may lower rational judgment without inhibiting behavior; under uncertainty it often prompts individuals to reduce decision risk by referencing others, producing a more passive or defensive form of conformity posting[28]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H3a: Positive affect has a positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.

H3b: Negative affect has a positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.

(4) Self-Efficacy and Conformity Information-Posting Behavior

Self-efficacy—an individual's judgment of their capability to perform a given behavior—is a key factor shaping behavioral choice, effort, and persistence[29], with higher self-efficacy increasing confidence under uncertainty and reducing concern about failure[30]. In conformity posting, which requires weighing information accuracy, others' evaluations, and social feedback, higher self-efficacy strengthens users' sense of control and expectation of success, making them more inclined toward follow-the-crowd expression based on existing consensus or popular content[31]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H4: Self-efficacy has a positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.

(5) Social Comparison Factors and Conformity Information-Posting Behavior

Social comparison may also directly shape posting decisions. Conformity theory holds that, facing uncertainty or social pressure, individuals reference others' behavior to gain recognition or avoid deviating from group norms[9]. The high visibility of others' posting on social media, reinforced by algorithmic recommendation and interactive feedback, provides a continuous point of reference that lowers the cost of independent decision-making, making conformity posting an efficient, low-risk choice[32]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H5: Social comparison factors have a significant positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.

(6) Platform and Information Environment and Self-Efficacy

The platform and information environment likewise shape self-efficacy. Per SOR theory, individuals process external stimuli such as platform functions internally to judge their own behavioral competence. Good platform design and interactive feedback lower the perceived difficulty of posting, while higher information credibility, clear content norms, and visible popularity cues reduce perceived risk and outcome uncertainty, enhancing users' self-efficacy assessment[33]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H6: The platform and information environment has a positive effect on self-efficacy.

(7) Platform and Information Environment and Conformity Information-Posting Behavior

The platform and information environment may also directly affect conformity posting. When individuals can clearly perceive group attitudes and mainstream trends, they are more inclined to follow the majority to reduce the risk of deviation; information popularity, credibility, and platform recommendation and interaction mechanisms give mainstream opinions greater visibility, providing users with a clear behavioral reference they may follow directly[34]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H7: Platform and information environment assessment has a significant positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.

(8) The Mediating Role of Internal Psychological Mechanisms

SOR theory indicates that external stimuli affect behavior only through internal psychological processing, chiefly emotional response and cognitive evaluation[35]. In the social comparison process, positive affect typically enhances willingness to express and participate, while negative affect, under uncertainty, may prompt individuals to reduce cognitive and decision risk by following others' views or the mainstream position[36]; emotional response may therefore mediate the link between social comparison factors and conformity posting. Self-efficacy, reflecting perceived competence and confidence, likewise shapes how users convert external stimuli into behavioral responses: users with higher self-efficacy are more likely to post based on existing consensus or popular content, while those with lower self-efficacy are more likely to rely on others' opinions or the platform's mainstream voice[37]. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H8a: Positive affect mediates the relationship between social comparison factors and conformity information-posting behavior.

H8b: Negative affect mediates the relationship between social comparison factors and conformity information-posting behavior.

H9a: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between social comparison factors and conformity information-posting behavior.
H9b: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between platform and information environment assessment and conformity information-posting behavior.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Questionnaire Design

A questionnaire survey collected data on users' basic characteristics and conformity posting behavior on social media. Part one covered demographic characteristics (gender, age, education) plus frequency of social media use and posting; part two measured conformity information-posting behavior and its hypothesized influencing factors—social comparison factors (upward/downward comparison tendency), platform and information environment factors (perceived risk, information credibility, information popularity, platform influence), and the mediating variables (positive affect, negative affect, self-efficacy). All items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire scale is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Questionnaire Variable Design

Latent Variable	Measurement Indicator	Item Design	Source
Social comparison factors	Upward social comparison tendency	US1 I often compare myself with people who are more successful or outstanding than me. US2 When I see others performing well, I think about whether I can also reach that level. US3 I actively follow the updates of people who are better than me in order to evaluate myself. US4 I hope to catch up with or surpass those who are better than me in performance.	Gibbons & Buunk[38]; Wang Mingji[39]
	Downward social comparison tendency	DS1 I often compare myself with people who are inferior to me, which makes me feel good about myself. DS2 When I see others doing worse than me in certain respects, I feel reassured or confident. DS3 I look at people or experiences worse than mine to confirm my own advantages. DS4 I improve my self-evaluation by comparing myself with those weaker than me.	Buunk[38]; Bai Xuejun[40]
Platform and information environment	Perceived risk	PR1 I think that posting or reposting content on the platform may involve privacy or security risks. PR2 I worry that the content I post may cause misunderstanding or bring negative effects. PR3 I feel that some content on the platform may mislead me into making incorrect judgments.	Kim[41]; Liu Tingyan[42]

Latent Variable	Measurement Indicator	Item Design	Source
	Information credibility	IC1 I think the information on the platform is generally quite reliable. IC2 I feel that the content I usually see is generally factually credible. IC3 I trust accounts or posters that are professional or authoritative. IC4 I believe that most of the information on the platform can be used as a reference.	Jin Mingxue et al.[34]
	Information popularity	IH1 I often see certain content being widely discussed or reposted on the platform. IH2 The platform frequently pushes content related to trending topics to me. IH3 I think the level of attention some topics receive on the platform is very high.	Jin Mingxue et al.[34]
	Platform influence	PI1 The platform's mechanisms for likes, comments, and recommendations influence whether I post content. PI2 I proactively post certain content in order to gain more interaction (e.g., likes or follows). PI3 The platform's recommendations or push notifications influence which content I am interested in or want to participate in.	Sun Shaojun & Zhang Yuhong[43]
Emotion	Positive affect	PE1 When browsing platform content, I usually feel happy or relaxed. PE2 When I see others sharing meaningful content, I feel positive or encouraged. PE3 I usually feel positive and happy when participating in discussions on the platform.	Yoo et al.[44]
	Negative affect	NE1 When I see others' performance or achievements, I feel uneasy or anxious. NE2 When others perform better than me, I feel stressed or down. NE3 After browsing platform content, I sometimes feel jealous or self-doubting.	Watson et al.[45]
Self-efficacy		SE1 I believe I can judge the reliability of information on the platform. SE2 I feel that I can clearly express my views on the platform and be understood by others. SE3 I am confident in distinguishing true from false information and making appropriate posting or reposting decisions accordingly. SE4 When facing different content, I can	Farmer, S.M.[46]

Latent Variable	Measurement Indicator	Item Design	Source
		maintain independent judgment without being swayed by others.	
Conformity information-posting behavior		CP1 When I see that most people are discussing or reposting a piece of information, I follow along by reposting or posting similar content. CP2 I tend to post information consistent with mainstream opinion in order to gain recognition. CP3 When uncertain, I am more likely to post or recommend information in the way others do.	Zhang Minghui[22]; Zhu Lin[11]

4. Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

From October to December 2025, questionnaires were distributed randomly via the Wenjuanxing (Sojump) platform and other online channels, yielding 547 responses. After excluding invalid responses (excessively short completion time or missing values), 500 valid samples remained (effective response rate 91.4%), meeting the study's requirements. The questionnaire variable design is shown in Table 1 above.

4.1 Data Analysis

Reliability and validity tests were conducted before further analysis. The sample was roughly gender-balanced, with most respondents under 40; 63% held a bachelor's degree or above, and 80% reported high social media activity. The sample thus skews young, well-educated, and highly active—consistent with the profile of core social media users—supporting the reliability of the study's conclusions.

4.2 Reliability Test

SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 29.0 were used for reliability and validity analysis. Cronbach's α, generally interpreted as acceptable above 0.6 and good above 0.7, exceeded 0.6 for every dimension, indicating good overall reliability. For convergent validity, AVE exceeded 0.5 for most factors; upward/downward social comparison tendency were slightly below this threshold but, combined with relatively high composite reliability, still show acceptable convergent validity. Results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Dimension	Factor	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Social comparison factors	Upward social comparison tendency	0.687	0.784	0.496
	Downward social comparison tendency	0.699	0.797	0.476
Platform and information environment	Perceived risk	0.696	0.772	0.533
	Information credibility	0.754	0.835	0.562
	Information popularity	0.678	0.772	0.532
	Platform influence	0.727	0.803	0.576

Dimension	Factor	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Emotion	Positive affect	0.699	0.892	0.734
	Negative affect	0.651	0.846	0.645
Self-efficacy		0.720	0.800	0.502
Conformity information-posting behavior		0.645	0.772	0.532

4.3 Validity Test

The scale's KMO value was 0.963, indicating suitability for factor analysis, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p < 0.001$, confirming the independence of the survey variables. As shown in Table 3, aside from CFI, IFI, and TLI (all above 0.85), all other fit indices fall within recommended ranges, indicating good model fit.

Table 3. Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Statistic	Recommended Value	Fit
χ^2	882.945	–	Excellent
χ^2/df	1.728	<3	Excellent
GFI	0.927	>0.9	Good
AGFI	0.915	>0.9	Good
CFI	0.896	>0.85	Good
RMSEA	0.038	<0.05	Excellent
IFI	0.897	>0.85	Acceptable
TLI	0.885	>0.85	Acceptable

4.4 Hypothesis Testing Results and Path Presentation

Structural equation modeling in AMOS 29.0 tested each hypothesis. As shown in Table 4, all direct-path hypotheses were supported: social comparison factors, platform and information environment factors, emotion, and self-efficacy all significantly affect conformity information-posting behavior. Social comparison factors act on conformity behavior both indirectly, through positive affect, negative affect, and self-efficacy, and directly; platform and information environment factors both raise self-efficacy and directly drive conformity behavior. These results verify the model's theoretical hypotheses and provide a basis for the mediation-effect tests that follow. The path diagram is shown in Figure 2.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Coef.	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
H1a: Social comparison factors have a positive effect on users' positive affect.	Social comparison factors → Positive affect	0.132	0.212	2.325	0.020	Supported
H1b: Social comparison factors have a positive effect on users' negative affect.	Social comparison factors → Negative affect	0.136	0.224	2.379	0.017	Supported
H2: Social comparison factors have a significant	Social comparison factors → Self-	0.252	0.149	2.732	0.006	Supported

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Coef.	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
effect on users' self-efficacy.	efficacy					
H3a: Positive affect has a positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.	Positive affect → Conformity posting behavior	0.155	0.096	2.284	0.022	Supported
H3b: Negative affect has a positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.	Negative affect → Conformity posting behavior	0.273	0.036	3.114	0.002	Supported
H4: Self-efficacy has a positive effect on conformity information-posting behavior.	Self-efficacy → Conformity posting behavior	0.346	0.071	4.935	***	Supported
H5: Social comparison factors have a significant effect on users' conformity information-posting behavior.	Social comparison factors → Conformity posting behavior	0.306	0.146	3.401	***	Supported
H6: Platform and information environment assessment has a significant positive effect on self-efficacy.	Platform and information environment → Self-efficacy	0.407	0.119	4.792	***	Supported

*Note: *** indicates $p < 0.001$.*

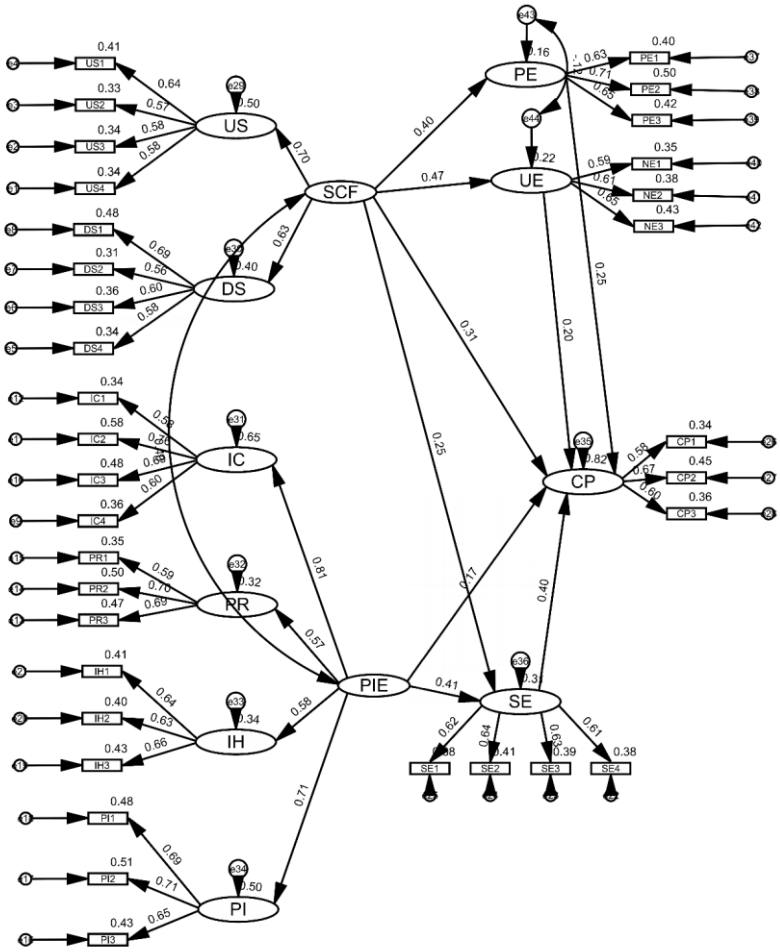


Figure 2. Path Diagram of Influencing Factors on Conformity Information-Posting Behavior from the Perspective of Social Comparison Theory

4.5 Mediation Effect Testing

Mediating effects were tested using the bias-corrected, non-parametric percentile bootstrap method (5,000 resamples, 95% confidence level). Self-efficacy significantly mediates the effects of both social comparison factors and the platform and information environment on conformity information-posting behavior, indicating that users' self-perceived competence is a key psychological mechanism linking external stimuli to conformity behavior. Positive affect also significantly mediates the effect of social comparison factors on conformity behavior, verifying the psychological-mechanism hypotheses in the theoretical model. Results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Test Results of Parallel Mediation-Effect Path Coefficients

Path	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	p	Relative Mediation Effect
Social comparison factors (SCF) → Conformity posting behavior (CP)	0.501	0.166	0.257	0.899	0.001	–
SCF → Positive affect (PE) → CP	0.007	0.003	0.003	0.014	0.000	0.011
SCF → Negative affect (NE) → CP	0.036	0.028	-0.005	0.115	0.076	0.052
Contrast of mediation effects: PE	-0.029	0.030	-0.112	0.002	0.072	-0.041

Path	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	p	Relative Mediation Effect
− NE						
SCF → Self-efficacy (SE) → CP	0.140	0.056	0.055	0.283	0.002	0.205
Platform and information environment (PIE) → CP	0.217	0.113	0.000	0.439	0.050	–
PIE → Self-efficacy (SE) → CP	0.199	0.060	0.103	0.346	0.000	0.478
Contrast of mediation effects: Self-efficacy (SE)	0.199	0.060	0.103	0.346	0.000	0.478

5. Discussion

5.1 Research Findings

Combining the structural equation modeling results with the bootstrap mediation test, the main findings are as follows:

(1) The Effects of Social Comparison Factors on Emotion and Self-Efficacy

Social comparison factors significantly affect users' emotional state, with a slightly stronger effect on negative affect (β = 0.412) than positive affect (β = 0.348), indicating that social comparison on social media more readily elicits anxiety, envy, and jealousy, though it can also produce satisfaction, pleasure, and pride. Social comparison factors also significantly raise self-efficacy (β = 0.274): by observing others' behavior and outcomes, users assess their own competence, gaining stronger decision-making confidence in conformity behavior. Social comparison thus generates both emotional drive and cognitive support for conformity behavior.

(2) The Effect of Emotion on Conformity Information-Posting Behavior and Its Psychological Logic

Both positive and negative affect significantly increase conformity information-posting behavior, with a stronger effect for negative affect (β = 0.376 vs. β = 0.315 for positive affect), suggesting that users in a negative emotional state are more likely to conform—perhaps to relieve anxiety, gain recognition, or reduce decision risk—while positive affect promotes conformity indirectly through participation motivation. The mediation analysis shows that positive affect partially mediates the effect of social comparison factors on conformity behavior (22.2% of the total effect), while negative affect's mediating effect, though present, was not significant (31.3%), suggesting its role is more subject to individual cognitive regulation than that of positive affect.

(3) The Core Role of Self-Efficacy in Behavior Formation

Self-efficacy significantly increases conformity information-posting behavior (β = 0.402) and mediates the effects of both social comparison factors (22.2%) and the platform environment (40.5%) on this behavior. This indicates that self-efficacy not only builds confidence but also improves users' ability to identify information, judge trends, and imitate behavior—especially when the platform environment is favorable and information credibility is high, making it an important psychological bridge toward group conformity.

(4) The Direct and Indirect Effects of the Platform and Information Environment

The platform and information environment directly increase conformity information-posting behavior (β = 0.307) and also act indirectly through self-efficacy (β = 0.199, 40.5% of the total effect), showing that content presentation, interaction mechanisms, and information credibility can drive conformity both directly and by strengthening users' self-cognition and perceived competence—meaning well-designed platforms and high-quality information environments activate both cognitive evaluation and psychological expectation.

5.2 Practical Implications

Grounded in social comparison, conformity, and SOR theory, this study's findings offer both theoretical support for social media user-behavior research and practical guidance for optimizing content ecosystems, guiding rational user behavior, and regulating information dissemination. The following implications are proposed:

(1) Optimizing Platform Content Mechanisms and Improving the Guidance of the Social Media Content Ecosystem

Since platform and information environment factors affect conformity posting both directly and indirectly through self-efficacy, platforms should treat “enhancing self-efficacy” as a core design principle, rather than relying solely on amplified popularity metrics, prominent mainstream opinions, or high-frequency instant feedback. Concretely, platforms could add self-expression tools—such as templates for distilling core viewpoints and quick fact-checking access—to ease users' anxiety about posting high-quality content, and could weight originality and logical coherence alongside popularity in interaction-feedback mechanisms while moderating trending-content push frequency, reducing reliance on group cues and building a foundation for rational posting judgment.

(2) Guiding Users toward Rational Information Posting and Enhancing Information Behavior and Media Literacy

Because emotional response and self-efficacy mediate the link between social comparison and conformity posting, users' posting choices are shaped by emotional state and perceived competence, not purely by rational judgment; content review and external norms alone cannot fully regulate conformity posting. Platforms, universities, and public-interest organizations should therefore jointly strengthen users' information literacy and psychological competence—for example, embedding “emotion management + rational expression” courses in a platform's youth mode for college students, certifying information-judgment competence to grant frequent posters access to high-quality content channels, and adding a posting-delay reminder during emotional fluctuations to help users choose between conformity and independent expression.

(3) Regulating the Order of Information Dissemination and Promoting Diversity in Social Media Content

While conformity posting improves diffusion efficiency, it can also intensify content homogenization and opinion convergence—problems rooted not only in individual preference but in the platform environment and psychological mechanisms shown above. In July 2025, the Cyberspace Administration of China's “Clear and Bright” campaign against false information published by “we-media” called for strengthening platforms' primary responsibility while guiding high-quality content cultivation and diverse dissemination[47]. Building on this, entertainment platforms should raise the weighting of “original content” labels, while information platforms should establish multi-perspective matching mechanisms that surface authoritative viewpoints when a user repeatedly browses single-stance content, balancing efficiency with content diversity.

References

QuestMobile Research Institute. QuestMobile 2025 New Media Ecosystem Review: 1.149 Billion MAU on Five Major Platforms, Differentiated Competition in Diverse Content and Algorithm Technology, Younger Users Prefer Cross-Platform Use [EB/OL]. [2025-12-16]. https://www.questmobile.com.cn/research/report/2000767092954075138.

Wu Jisiguleng. Research on the Impact of Social Media Intelligent Recommendation on Group Information Behavior in Major Emergencies [D]. Changchun: Jilin University, 2024.

MYERS D G, LAMM H. The group polarization phenomenon [J]. Psychological Bulletin, 1976, 83(4): 602-627.

Zhang Xiaoyue. “Secondary Account as Privacy”: A Study on the Characteristics of Generation Z Users' Social Media Information Publishing Behavior [J]. Information and Documentation Services, 2024, 45(3): 60-69.

Feng Yueqin. Research on Influencing Factors of Weibo Users' Health Information Sharing Behavior [D]. Zhejiang University of Media and Communications, 2024.

Mo Zuying, Wang Kaishuo, Zhao Yueming. An Empirical Study on the Influence Model of Social Media Users' Conformity Communication Behavior of Misinformation [J]. Information and Documentation Services, 2023, 44(01): 72-81.

Zhang Kun, Li. Research on the Influence Mechanism of Social Media Users' Conformity Information Sharing Behavior: From the Perspective of Triadic Attribution Theory [J]. Information and Documentation Services, 2022, 43(06): 58-67.

FESTINGER L. A theory of social comparison processes [J]. Human Relations, 1954, 7(2): 117-140.

SHERIF M. An experimental approach to the study of attitudes [J]. Sociometry, 1937, 1(1/2): 90-98.

ASCH S E. Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgments [C]//GUETZKOW H. Groups, Leadership and Men. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1951: 177-190.

Zhu Lin, Wang Lei, Chen Chang, et al. Research on Conformity Behavior in Network Information Dissemination—Taking Microblog as an Example [J]. Journal of Modern Information, 2014, 34(12): 17-22.

Guo Bingyan. Research on Influencing Factors of College Students' Reposting Behavior on Douyin [D]. Nanning: Guangxi Minzu University, 2024.

Zha Xianjin, Huang Chengsong, Yan Yalan. A Grounded Analysis of the Driving Factors of Conformity Information Seeking—Taking Weibo Trending Topics as an Example [J]. Library & Information, 2022(2): 1-9.

Deng Shengli, Zhao Haiping, Qin Yang. Research Progress on Social Networking Users' Information Behavior [J]. Advances in Information Science, 2018, 12(0): 271-298.

Yu Jing, Liu Chen. An Empirical Study on the Information Publishing Behavior Pattern of Weibo Users [J]. Journal of Modern Information, 2015, 35(10): 49-54.

Zhai Zhizhuo. Research on Influencing Factors of Users' Information Publishing Behavior in UGC Community—Taking Keep as an Example [J]. Information Research, 2022(3): 33-39.

Zhu Yining. Research on Influencing Factors of Users' Information Sharing Behavior Based on UGC Community—Taking Xiaohongshu App as an Example [D]. Jilin University of Finance and Economics, 2022.

SULS J, MILLER R. Social Comparison Processes: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives [M]. Washington: Hemisphere, 1977.

HAKMILLER K L. Threat as a determinant of downward comparison [J]. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1966, 1(S1): 32-39.

MARTINOT D, REDERSDORFF S. The variable impact of upward and downward social comparisons on self-esteem: When the level of analysis matters [C]//Social

Comparison and Social Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 127-150.
Wang Wei, Guo Junling, Su Qianqian, et al. Technology as Double-edged Sword vs. It Varies from Person to Person: The Influence of Technological and Psychological Characteristics on Social Media Users' Discontinuous Usage Behavior [J]. China Journal of Information Systems, 2022(2): 85-100.
Zhang Minghui. The Effect of Upward Social Comparison on Negative Information Publishing Behavior Among College Students in Social Media Use [D]. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, 2025.
TOLMAN E C. Purposive Behavior in Animals and Men [M]. California: University of California Press, 1932: 8-19.
Zhao Li, Bai Sha. The Relationship between Anxiety, Depression and Social Comparison in the Digital Media Era [J]. Advances in Psychological Science, 2025, 33(1): 92-113.
Wang Leiping, Zhao Yilin, Zhang Zhen. Social Media Use and Positive/Negative Affect in Middle-aged and Older Adults: The Mediating Role of Upward and Downward Social Comparison [J]. Psychological Exploration, 2024, 44(2): 134-141.
Niu Jing, Chang Mingzhi. Study on Social Interaction Stressors and Discontinuous Use Intention in Social Media Use [J]. Journalism & Communication Review, 2018, 71(06): 5-19.
BEATTY S E, FERRELL M E. Impulse buying: Modeling its precursors [J]. Journal of Retailing, 1998, 74(2): 169-191.
Shen Han. Evolutionary Analysis of Opinion and Information Propagation with Emotional Tendency on Two-Layer Social Networks [D]. Wuhan University of Science and Technology, 2023.
PAJARES F. Current directions in self-efficacy research [J]. Advances in Motivation and Achievement, 1997(10): 1-49.
Zhang Li, Sun Xiaoning, Zhu Qinghua. Research on User Behavior of Social Search Based on Triadic Reciprocal Determinism Model [J]. Information Studies: Theory & Application, 2021, 44(04): 40-49.
Chen Zhe. Upward Social Comparison, Social Media Fatigue and Lurking Behavior of WeChat Reading Users—Based on a Moderated Mediation Model [J]. Journal of Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, 2025, 33(10): 1-7.
Li Zengze, Wu Zhengyu, Hou Yating, et al. Impact of Online Upward Social Comparison on College Students' Employment Pressure: A Chain Mediating Model [J]. China Journal of Health Psychology, 2025.
Huang Yunxue. Research on Influencing Factors of Weibo Users' Health Information Sharing Behavior in Information Encountering Context [D]. Heilongjiang University, 2025.
Jin Mingxue, Huang Lixia, Zhang Tao. The Influence of Emotion on College Students' Health Information Sharing Behavior from a Lean Perspective [J]. Information Research, 2025(1): 29-38.
Han Zhengbiao, Zhai Ranran. Research on the Mechanism of Emotion in Users' Information Behavior Models [J]. Information Studies: Theory & Application, 2022, 45(12): 103-110.
Yang Yongqing, Xu Yuncheng, Fan Zhiping, et al. Research on Emotion-Driven User Content Creation and Information Dissemination Behavior in Social Networks [J]. Journal of Modern Information, 2023, 43(7): 162-177.
BANDURA A. Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change [J]. Advances in Behaviour Research and Therapy, 1978(4): 139-161.
GIBBONS F X, BUUNK B P. Individual differences in social comparison: Development of a scale of social comparison orientation [J]. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1999, 76(1): 129-142.

Wang Mingji, Wang Lei, Shi Junqi. Reliability and Validity of the Chinese Version of the Iowa–Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure [J]. Chinese Mental Health Journal, 2006(5): 302-305, 316.

Bai Xuejun, Liu Xu, Liu Zhijun. The Mediating Effect of Social Comparison between Achievement Goals and Self-efficacy for Learning of Junior High School Students [J]. Journal of Psychological Science, 2013, 36(6): 1413-1418.

KIM H W, CHAN H C, GUPTA S. Value-based adoption of mobile internet: An empirical investigation [J]. Decision Support Systems, 2007, 43(1): 111-126.

Liu Tingyan, Wang Xiwei, Zhang Yu. Research on Influencing Factors of Users' Information Interaction Behavior in Live Streaming E-commerce Based on the TAM Model [J]. Journal of Modern Information, 2022, 42(11): 27-39.

Sun Shaojun, Zhang Yuhong. Research on User Participation Motivation of Social Commerce UGC Platforms—Taking Xiaohongshu as an Example [J]. Design, 2017(7): 14-15.

YOO C, PARK J, MACINNIS D J. Effects of store characteristics and in-store emotional experiences on store attitude [J]. Journal of Business Research, 1998, 42(3): 253-263.

WATSON D, CLARK L A, TELLEGEN A. Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales [J]. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1988, 54(6): 1063-1070.

FARMER S M, TIERNEY P, KUNG-MCINTYRE K. Employee creativity in Taiwan: An application of role identity theory [J]. Academy of Management Journal, 2003, 46(5): 618-630.

The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. The Cyberspace Administration of China Specialized in Rectifying the Chaos of “We-media” Publishing False Information [EB/OL]. [2025-07-29]. https://www.cac.gov.cn/2025-07/29/c_1755503642582366.htm.