

Exploring the Differences in Information Encountering Among Young Users of Mobile Social Media in China Under Different Moods

Haonan Sun¹, Hamed Mohd Adnan²

¹Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6962-5356>

²Professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Correspondence: Hamed Mohd Adnan, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7096-5225>

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Abstract

Noticing is an important stage in information encountering when the user becomes aware of the information (Erdelez, 2004). Despite the large amount of research confirming that different information behaviours affect users' moods, there is still a dearth of research on the noticing of information encountering in different moods. This study surveyed 252 Chinese youth using fsQCA to explore the combination differences of triggers on mobile social media information encountering among youth in China under different moods. This study finds that there are significant differences among moods: In a positive mood, users are more receptive to information usefulness and ease-of-use, indicating that positive moods may enhance information processing. In a neutral mood, the focus shifts towards the information interestingness and environment tolerance, demonstrates a relative lack of concern for one's surroundings and a focus on discovering entertaining information on mobile social media. And in a negative mood, users' attention to information is more complexed influenced by information quality, information interestingness, social influence and matching cognition, suggesting that users become very critical of the various factors that influence information encountered information when they are in a bad mood. This study offers valuable insights into the relationship between mood and information encountering on mobile social media, providing communication practitioners with actionable strategies for tailoring content based on users' moods. By understanding how mood influences information reception and processing, communicators can enhance message delivery and audience engagement.

Keywords: information encountering, information behaviour, mood, mobile social media, fsQCA

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, social media platforms have revolutionized the way we share information, enabling users to distribute, exchange, and access content instantly and effortlessly. This transformation has made it easier than ever for individuals and organizations to connect, communicate, and engage with a global audience. This greatly enriches the content of mobile social media platforms, and people can spend a lot of time searching through information to find what they need or are interested in (Yang et al., 2023). The massive amount of information also increases the difficulty and time cost of people's information search (Ji, 2023). In such a huge amount of information, even with a powerful search engine, it is still very challenging to find a part of the information that is valuable. Tremendous information resources make human information behaviour a highly complex research area in the field of information science (Sun et al. 2021). At the same time, mobile social media is also a popular topic in today's information science research (Yang et al., 2023). It has shifted the focus of information encountering research to the complex social media. Additionally, Mobile social media platforms, through their algorithms and design features, play a critical role in shaping users' exposure to information (Brady et al., 2023). These platforms push information flows that aligns with users' current affects, thereby influencing information encountering and the overall experience (Zhou et al., 2023). While all means of searching for information seem to have been exhausted without finding any valuable information, people often stumble upon a lot of useful information without directly searching for it (Daradkeh et al., 2015). Bernier (1960) called this phenomenon serendipity, and it was the first time that serendipity appeared in research in the field of information.

The definition and conceptualization of Serendipity in the field of information science by scholars have not yet been unified,

among which the more later representative ones are information encountering (Erdelez, 1995). Erdelez first introduced the concept of information encountering, which means unexpected discovery of information that is useful for problem solving or satisfies a personal interest. In her thesis, while pointing out two basic characteristics of information encountering: low involvement and no expectation. Other scholars have studied information encountering from an outcome (Fine & Deegan, 1996), a process (Makri & Blandford, 2012a, 2012b), a trigger (Thudt et al., 2012), a method (McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015), to that of a subjective experience (Zhou et al., 2018). Building on these diverse perspectives, the current study objective is to investigate the combination of triggers of information encountering, particularly focusing on how different communication processes on mobile social media platforms influence this phenomenon under different moods.

Mood, as a persistent affect (Bottemanne et al., 2022), significantly impacts communication effectiveness, influencing how users engage with and interpret messages on mobile social platforms. Positive moods may enhance receptivity to persuasive messages (Putrevu, 2014), while negative moods might heighten scepticism and critical evaluation of the communicated information (Forgas, 2019). Hume (2012) had explored the features of moods, which can last for hours or even days and are relatively dull and last longer compare with emotion. They are also a reaction to events or actions, but can be transformed by strong and deep emotions (Bottemanne et al., 2022). Hence, mood is considered to affect many factors of people's daily human experience and play an important role (Soleimaninejadian et al., 2018), it becomes evident that mood is crucial for comprehensively exploring their impact on triggering information encountering.

Research on the relationship between mood and information encounters is very limited. Existing studies have mainly focused on static personal characteristics and environmental factors, while neglecting the central role of mood as a dynamic function (e.g., Erdelez, 2004; Jiang et al., 2015). Although some studies have found correlations between mood states and frequency of information encountering, these studies have not distinguished between mood categories (e.g., positive/negative) or revealed how mood moderates the pathways of action of specific factors (e.g., McCay-Peet & Toms, 2015; Gong, 2021). None of their studies further elaborated on the different effects of such moods on which factors of information encountering, nor did they mention the differences between the factors triggering information encountering in different moods, or the comparison between different moods. These are all urgent areas for further research in the context of mobile social media.

Overall, the encountered information that is noticed can solve one of their problems or meet one of their needs (Blandford, 2017). Information judgement requires a combination of multiple personal factors (Beer, 2021). The primary aim of this research is to systematically investigate the role of moods in the noticing of information encountering among Chinese youth on mobile social media. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how variations in mood - positive, neutral, and negative - affect the way young users perceive and engage with information on mobile social media, and how this engagement is influenced by multiple factors within the realms of information transmission, reception, and user interaction. Base on the research aiming, this research provokes the following questions:

What are the significant factors that trigger information encountering in different moods, and how do these factors differ across moods?

This study will use a survey questionnaire to investigate participants and fsQCA to examine above questions. The analysis will be conducted separately for the moods of positive, neutral, and negative, to compare the differences within them. This study can provide more understanding and support for information encountering, and understand how moods effect on people's noticing to information.

The significance of this research lies in its exploration of mood's influence on information encountering within the realm of mobile social media, particularly among Chinese youth. Understanding how mood affects the noticing and processing of information is crucial for developing effective communication strategies and enhancing user engagement. This study is timely, given the rapid growth of mobile social media use and its impact on information consumption behaviours. By identifying the factors that trigger information encountering in different moods, this research aims to offer insights into the design of more targeted and emotionally intelligent content, ultimately improving message delivery and audience interaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Information Encountering

Since Erdelez (1995) first proposed the concept of information encountering, research in the field of information science has increased. Erdelez (2004) introduced the concept of information encountering as a serendipitous means of obtaining information, as opposed to information seeking behaviour, to explain serendipitous discovery. Different researchers have explored the characteristics of information encountering. McCay-Peet and Toms, (2015) believes that information encountering needs to be both low in expectations and interest; Zhou et al., (2018) requires that information encountering must also meet the criteria of being both low in expectations and relevant. Although there is currently no unified definition

of information encountering, it can be seen from the above representative concepts and definitions that although there are differences in the definitions and explanations of different scholars, both emphasize the two essential characteristics of “low involvement” and “low expectation” in the information encountering process.

The theoretical frameworks of information encountering have been developed to understand serendipity better. Erdelez (2000, 2004) uses the five components of Noticing, Stopping, Examining, Capturing and Returning as the elements of the process of information encountering. Noticing is the perception and cognition of encountered information; Stopping is to interrupt the initial information search activity and immerse oneself in the encountered information; Examining is to evaluate the usefulness of the encountered information; Capturing refers to the encountered information that can solve problems, make choices and save; Returning refers to continuing the initial task. Figure 1. is the theoretical diagram that is shown below:

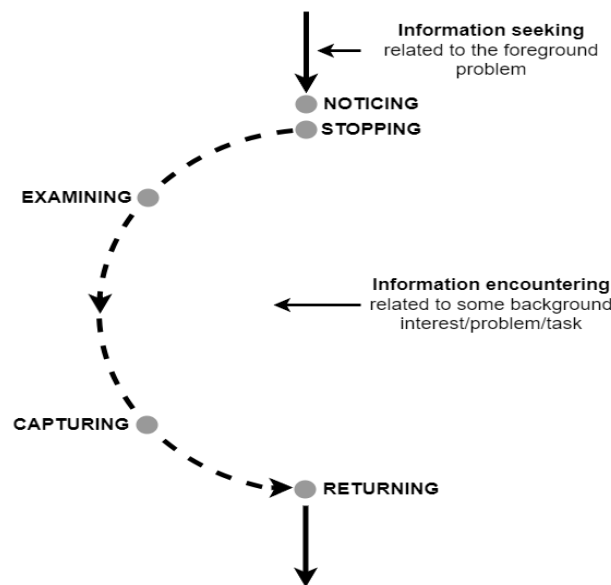


Figure 1. Information Encountering Model

Source: Adapted from Erdelez (2004)

Numerous researchers have explored the factors influencing the information encountering based on this framework. Erdelez (2004) examined respondents' experiences of information encountering in an academic environment, noting that information encountering is an integral part of individuals' browsing and information-seeking activities, and proposing that the four dimensions of the factors influencing information encountering are user, environment, information, and need, which is subsequently categorized as a user factor. Jiang et al. (2015) in their proposed model of online information encountering, divided the influence of user, information, and environment on information encountering from two perspectives of stable and dynamic factors: Among the stable factors are user intentionality, curiosity, activity diversity, types of information, relevance, quality, and time limit of the environment; Among the dynamic factors are the user's sensitivity, emotions, attitudes, and expertise, the visibility and sources of information, and the interface usefulness of the environment. All of these factors have a positive impact on online information encountering. Gong (2021) found that the application and perceived ease-of-use in the information factor, the time state, location environment, task context and network environment in the environment factor, and the individual cognition and emotion state in the user factor would positively affect the information encountering by studying the factors influencing the information encountering and the behavioural process in the short video. The above studies show that although there are various fields of research on the influencing factors of information encountering, and most of the studies have different focuses and complex factors, they mainly focus on the three dimensions of information factors, environmental factors, and individual factors to explore their influences on information encountering.

2.2 Moods and Related Studies in Information Science

The triggering of information encountering is not only dependent on objective information features, but also influenced by users' subjective psychological states. Among them, Mood, as a persistent emotional tone, may indirectly shape chance encounter behaviour by modulating attentional preference and information processing depth. Moods are differentiated from acute emotions in that they are longer lasting, and are detached from any immediate triggering stimulus (Botteman et al., 2022). Unlike the study of emotion, which was developed as early as the end of the 19th century, the study of mood did not begin to sprout until the middle of the 20th century. Nowlis (1961) created the first mood questionnaire to study

the effect of drugs on human mood. Shaver et al. (1987) was used a hierarchical cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling (MDS) which divided mood into two groups: pleasant and unpleasant as the first level. And there are ten more detailed divisions under the second the third groups. Sun et al. (2021) designed a pre-study in which participants were stimulated in different ways in the hope that they would display different moods. However, these studies that categorize moods themselves, or that are based on pre-experimental stimuli that involve participants' moods, do not have a unified standard for measuring mood. Overall, the categorizes of mood are complicated and no unified definition has been formed. Therefore, this study chooses to categorize moods into three broad categories: positive, neutral and negative, without further subdivisions.

The research between mood and information started from 1990s. People in a positive mood are more likely to rely on illuminating information (Schwarz et al., 1991). People with a positive mood are also more confident and will be more influenced by their personal knowledge structure (Bless et al., 1996). People with the positive mood signals a benign environment in which there is no need for systematic appraisal of the information, and more heuristic appraisal is used (Schwarz, 2001). Tan et al. (2020) found that individuals with positive and neutral moods who have more time to process information are able to do so systematically. Baishya and Choudhury (2023) analysed the effect of mood on information search found that a positive mood significantly affects the focus on one's own favourable information and but focuses on unfavourable information in a negative mood. Mood affects information search behaviour, positive and neutral mood does not have an effect on simple or complex search, but in a negative mood complex search is difficult to be completed (Rezaei & Zanganeh, 2017). Mood likewise has a similar impact on information encountering. Gong (2021) found that users in a positive mood are more likely to trigger information encountering in short video situations, while users in a negative mood are unable to distinguish the usefulness of information.

In summary, it is unclear how the user's mood as a precondition affects the user's perception of encountered information on mobile social media. In order to locate the theoretical value of this study, it is necessary to first clarify the core concept of information encountering and the research progress of its influencing factors. Since Erdelez (1995) proposed the information encountering model, the academic community has gradually shifted from static element analysis to dynamic mechanism exploration, yet the role of mood as a key dynamic variable has still not been fully revealed. Based on Erdelez's work, this study focuses on the noticing stage before information encountering, exploring the similarities and differences in factors influencing users' attention to encountered information in different moods on mobile social media. Limited research has been conducted on the impact of different moods, providing a unique perspective for this study.

3. Research Methodology and Data Collection

Based on the findings supported by previous theories in the information domain and existing empirical studies in the field of information encountering, this study starts from the three aspects of information, environmental and personal factors. Specifically, information quality (Cha et al., 2015; Chen, 2021), information usefulness (Yuan, 2014), information interestingness (Liu et al., 2021), information ease-of-use (Zhang & Hu, 2017), environmental tolerance (Agarwal, 2017), social influence (Mertzani et al., 2022), and matching cognition (Erdelez & Makri, 2020) all of above variables have been confirmed to be positively correlated with information encountering by previous studies. Triggering mobile social media information encountering was used as the dependent variable and 7-Likert scale was used as the basis and fsQCA was applied to explore the similarities and differences in positive, neutral and negative mood. FsQCA provides a rigorous method for identifying complex causal patterns. It allows for the examination of multiple conditions leading to an outcome, which is particularly useful in social science research (Fiss, 2011).

3.1 Survey Instrument

The overall questionnaire design was also based on their relevant research. The questionnaire for this study consisted of two parts: the first part consisted of four questions that were used to determine whether the participant meets the requirement of this study; the second part consisted of 24 questions consisting of the seven dependent variables and one independent variable as described above, combined with the hypotheses of the positive, neutral, and negative mood, a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) is used to capture the nuanced participants' response of above variables, allowing for a more detailed analysis of their attitudes and perceptions (Muhenje, 2023). Appendix I shows the questions and descriptive analysis.

3.2 Data Collection

Given that the research subjects in this study are youth of mobile social media aged from 18-29 which defined by Arnett (2010), this age group as a distinct demographic entity. This study recruited participants via convenience sample to fill in the questionnaire by posting information on mobile social media (e.g. Douyin and Xiaohongshu) in China. In order to avoid the problem of bias, this study, firstly, adopts anonymous completion so that participants can fill out the questionnaire with confidence. Furthermore, the data are not collected from a single province, but rather the questionnaire data are collected as much as possible from young users from all parts of China. Lastly, questionnaires that do not meet

the requirements (e.g., age is not in the survey interval, and all options of the questionnaire select a single answer, etc.) are excluded from the present study in order to avoid invalid questionnaires. Eventually, a total of 363 questionnaires were collected in this study, and after removing all the non-compliant questionnaires, there were 252 valid questionnaires, with a recovery effectiveness rate of 69.4 per cent. Pappas and Woodside (2021) mentioned that the sample size of fsQCA from very small (less than 50 cases) to very large (thousands of cases), which is able to choose suitable sample size base on specific research. Hence this research allows for further testing.

3.3 Demographic

The following personal information based on questionnaires: the number of male subjects was 140, or 55.6 per cent, and the number of female subjects was 112, or 44.4 per cent. According to the distribution of education level, the highest education level of 3 participants was high school and below; 39 were studying or graduated from diploma; 187 were studying or graduated from bachelor's degree programme, accounting for the largest number; 18 were studying or graduated from master's degree programme; and 5 were studying or graduated from doctoral degree programme. In terms of age, the number of participants aged 18-23 was as high as 207; the number of participants aged 24-29 was 45. This shows that young people aged 18-23 are the main force of mobile social media users.

4. Analysis

Existing research on information encountering is often based on structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse single-factor effects (Chen, 2021), which makes it difficult to capture multivariate synergies. fsQCA was introduced to provide a methodological breakthrough for this purpose, and is able to shed light on the multifactorial causal complexity of mood drives. This study applies fsQCA, a method in which the outcome and predictor variables are not binary dichotomous scales but continuous fuzzy scales. Moreover, the method identifies patterns of combinations between several different variables, using multi-conditional variable linkage to act on the outcome variable (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). In addition, fsQCA offers necessary and sufficient condition. These conditions can be labelled by presence, absence or no exist conditions. Necessary and sufficient condition lead to the distinction between core and peripheral elements. Core elements are those that have a strong causal relationship with the outcome and peripheral elements are those that have a weak causal relationship with the outcome (Fiss, 2011).

FsQCA has independent measures for variables, so all variables need to be assigned values from 0-1 in a fuzzy set manner. Specifically, 1 indicates Full Membership and 0 indicates Full Non-membership. Therefore, all variables are continuous from 0-1 and are used to represent levels among their membership. The fsQCA procedure converts variables into calibration sets by setting three meaningful thresholds: full membership, full non-membership, and the cross-over point, which describes whether the case is more in or out of a set (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). The calibration is done by following the procedure employed by Van der Heijden et al. (2018), the full membership, full non-membership threshold and crossover point were fixed at the rating of 7, 1 and 4.

4.1 Analysis of Necessity for a Single Variable

Table 1. Analysis of Necessity

| Variable | Positive Mood | | Neutral Mood | | Negative Mood | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------|--------------|----------|---------------|----------|
| | Consistency | Coverage | Consistency | Coverage | Consistency | Coverage |
| High Information Quality | 0.950 | 0.852 | 0.899 | 0.874 | 0.853 | 0.886 |
| Low Information Quality | 0.222 | 0.911 | 0.296 | 0.951 | 0.351 | 0.855 |
| High Information Usefulness | 0.873 | 0.885 | 0.851 | 0.871 | 0.857 | 0.863 |
| Low Information Usefulness | 0.334 | 0.895 | 0.329 | 0.906 | 0.339 | 0.891 |
| High Information Interestingness | 0.891 | 0.866 | 0.881 | 0.892 | 0.875 | 0.878 |
| Low Information Interestingness | 0.289 | 0.903 | 0.309 | 0.875 | 0.322 | 0.855 |
| High Information Ease-of-use | 0.869 | 0.857 | 0.873 | 0.874 | 0.855 | 0.859 |
| Low Information Ease-of-use | 0.308 | 0.892 | 0.300 | 0.880 | 0.335 | 0.887 |
| High Environmental Tolerance | 0.882 | 0.888 | 0.858 | 0.901 | 0.821 | 0.875 |
| Low Environmental Tolerance | 0.325 | 0.886 | 0.348 | 0.896 | 0.371 | 0.854 |
| High Social Influence | 0.868 | 0.867 | 0.873 | 0.872 | 0.883 | 0.889 |
| Low Social Influence | 0.328 | 0.913 | 0.312 | 0.919 | 0.314 | 0.826 |
| High Matching Cognition | 0.840 | 0.837 | 0.822 | 0.848 | 0.794 | 0.856 |
| Low Matching Cognition | 0.332 | 0.933 | 0.345 | 0.926 | 0.387 | 0.869 |

Once calibration is complete, testing whether individual variables are necessary for the outcome variable can be analysed

in terms of consistency (Fiss, 2011). When consistency is greater than 0.9, it indicates that a single condition variable is a necessary condition for the outcome variable. Based on the fsQCA 4.0 software, the necessary condition of each variable can be calculated as Table 1. As can be seen from the table, the consistency of information quality is greater than 0.9 only in positive mood, which indicates that high information quality is considered as a necessary condition in mobile social media only if the information encountering is in positive mood, and a single variable cannot explain differences among moods, therefore, analysis is necessity.

4.2 Analysis of Sufficiency for Configurations

Configuration analysis of condition variables is a central aspect of the qualitative comparative analysis methodology and is designed to explore how combinations of condition variables work together. This threshold should be 3 or higher for large samples (>100) (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Fiss, 2011). This study sets the consistency threshold to 0.8 and the frequency threshold to 3 when constructing the truth table. After that, the data is filtered by judging the values of raw consistency and PRI consistency. A value of raw consistency greater than 0.8 and a value of PRI greater than 0.75 proves that this path can be analysed further and the raw consistency of all the paths was above 0.8 and the analysis could be continued (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Fiss, 2011). However, the value of PRI consistency is around 0.85 and the data produces significant breaks, so the PRI value was set to be greater than 0.85 in this study. The standard analyses were continued through fsQCA software and finally complex, intermediate and simple solutions were obtained. Finally, the configurations 5, 6 and 6 were obtained under positive mood, neutral mood and negative mood respectively. However, by observing the consistency, raw coverage and unique coverage of each configuration, it was found that raw coverage differed greatly, and the configuration with higher raw coverage had better explanatory strength. Therefore, in this study, the groupings under three different moods were screened to obtain four configurations respectively, and shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Configurations for Triggering the Noticing of Information Encountering

| | Positive Mood | | | | Neutral Mood | | | | Negative Mood | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|----------------------|
| | A1 Efficiency- driven | A2a Utility- oriented | A2b | A3 Demand- matching | B1a Environment- tolerance | B1b | B2 Environment- transcending | B3 | C1 Mood's compensation | C2a Social anchoring | C2b | C3 Mood relief |
| Information Quality | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Information Usefulness | | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Information Interestingness | ● | | | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● | | ● |
| Information Ease-of-use | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | ● |
| Environment Tolerance | ● | ● | | ● | | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Social Influence Matching Cognition | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Consistency | 0.971 | 0.957 | 0.955 | 0.961 | 0.970 | 0.961 | 0.977 | 0.981 | 0.974 | 0.968 | 0.971 | 0.967 |
| Raw coverage | 0.709 | 0.709 | 0.724 | 0.702 | 0.686 | 0.681 | 0.659 | 0.644 | 0.614 | 0.623 | 0.617 | 0.638 |
| Unique Coverage | 0.035 | 0.010 | 0.035 | 0.035 | 0.025 | 0.022 | 0.025 | 0.010 | 0.017 | 0.026 | 0.020 | 0.036 |
| Overall solution consistency | | 0.927 | | | | 0.948 | | | | 0.953 | | |
| Overall solution coverage | | 0.807 | | | | 0.768 | | | | 0.724 | | |

Note: Black circles (●) indicate the presence of a condition, and circles with “x” (⊗) indicate its absence. Large circles indicate core conditions; small ones, peripheral conditions. Blank spaces indicate no existing.

4.5 Robustness Test

The PRI threshold is raised from 0.85 to 0.90 to test the robustness of the sufficient condition configurations of mobile social media information encountering for young Chinese people under different moods, and the newly formed configurations are not different from the previous ones. There are only minor differences in the consistency and coverage of the overall solution, indicating that the results are robustness.

4.6 Results of fsQCA

In conjunction with previous studies, consistency and overall consistency of 0.8 or more is acceptable, and higher overall coverage indicates stronger explanatory power of the configuration. All consistency and overall consistency in this study are above 0.9, and overall coverage is above 0.7, which indicates that the data in this study have strong explanatory power. This shows that the triggering of information encountering in mobile social media in different moods not only presents a different configuration, but also has a strong power of explanation of the sufficient condition, which can further answer the research questions.

4.6.1 The Configurations under Positive Mood

The four configurations that trigger mobile social media users to notice encountered information under positive mood can be classified into 3 categories.

A1 shows that information ease-of-use is the core variable in this set of configurations. People also tend to want to continue their good mood in some way when they are in a good mood (Johnson & Stapel, 2011). Easy-to-use information allows users to browse and access more content, increasing user efficiency, which will increase user satisfaction. Therefore, this study names A1 as the efficiency-driven encountering. Users generally experience this type of information encountering during fragmented times such as commuting, with a core focus on information ease-of-use, emphasizing a smooth experience. Users quickly swipe through information feeds trying to obtain low-cost understanding information, which is often of high quality and quite interesting, allowing users to develop a certain level of tolerance towards their environment.

The two sets of configurations in A2 show that usefulness and ease-of-use of information are core variables. When people are in a good mood, users may be more inclined to noticing information that can improve their productivity at work or in life (Coviello et al., 2022). Hence this research named A2a and A2b as utility-oriented encountering. Users would prefer to browse useful and easy-to-use information in order to make better use of their time. In addition, in this configuration, users would prefer to browse information that is relatively in line with their own cognition, suggesting that users will achieve a subjective judgement of the value of the information.

A3, on the other hand, takes information usefulness as a core variable. Similar to A2, users want to be able to access useful information when they are in a good mood, and they can accept boring information if it is valuable enough. In this context, users are not concerned with the easy to understanding of information. This indicates that users in a positive mood can deeply explore valuable but dull information that matches their needs. Hence this research named A3 as demand-matching encountering. In other words, users are willing to think deeply about useful information when they are in a good mood.

Overall, in a positive mood, users are more concerned with information usefulness and ease-of-use, which are considered as core variables. Easy-to-use information not only improves users' browsing efficiency, but also enhances satisfaction, making it easier for them to digest high-quality content, which in turn creates a positive mood. At the same time, users tend to look for information that enhances their work and life efficiency, and expect this information to conform to their own cognition, thus making subjective value judgement. When the information is useful enough, users are willing to think deeply even if the content is boring. Therefore, a good mood motivates users to pursue high-quality, easy-to-use and valuable information more actively.

4.6.2 The Configurations under Neutral Mood

The four configurations that trigger mobile social media users' information encountering in a neutral mood can likewise be classified into two categories. Information quality is likewise a peripheral sufficient condition and information interest and environmental tolerance are core sufficient conditions for users.

The two configurations of B1 show that information interestingness is the core variable for such configurations. When users browse mobile social media when they are in a neutral mood, it is more for entertainment and amusement, so they will pay more attention to interesting and easy-to-understand content (Gao & Qiu, 2023). In this case, This study names B1a and B1b as entertainment-oriented encountering. These occur when users browse interesting content with low expectations and low engagement to satisfy their entertainment needs.

B2 takes environmental tolerance as a core sufficient condition. In other words, when users are in a calm state and browsing information, if the information is of certain quality and value, has social influence, and matches the user's cognition, users can overlook environmental discomfort through highly attractive content. On this basis, B3 also considers the interestingness of information as a core sufficient condition. Therefore, this study names B2 and B3 as environment-transcending encountering, meaning that when users are in an environment they dislike, information with multiple overlapping factors can support users in long-term immersion in the information, thereby breaking through the physical limitations of environmental tolerance.

Overall, in a neutral mood, mobile social media users notice encountered information mainly in terms of information interestingness and high environmental tolerance. Users tend to notice interesting and understandable content for entertainment and amusement. Moreover, users are more likely to ignore external distractions and focus on interesting information when using mobile social media when they are in a neutral mood, which enables them to assess the value of information more calmly. In addition, when in a neutral mood, some mobile social media users have certain requirements for information, environment and personal factors, but these requirements are not specific and only provoke noticing when they encounter information that interesting or ease-of-use.

4.6.3 The Configurations under Negative Mood

The four configurations that trigger mobile social media users' information encountering in a negative mood can likewise be divided into three categories. The configurations become complex and varied in this mood. It is worth noting that the emergence of personal cognition as a core variable only in the case of negative mood, which deserves to be analysed in depth.

C1 takes in information quality, information usefulness, social influence and matching cognition as the core sufficient conditions, which have shown that the complication of users' information acquisition under negative mood. According to Selective Exposure Theory, People in a negative mood may avoid making further worse by harshly sifting through information (Heinström et al., 2022), and tend to be exposed to information that is consistent with their own views, thus reinforcing pre-existing attitudes rather than changing them (Johnson et al, 2019). Therefore, this research named C1 as mood's compensation encountering, users noticed interesting and matching cognition information to relieve their stress, and promote the sense of belonging. Negative mood can lead to resistance against new opinions, as individuals may prioritize their moods over rational evaluation, resulting in a lack of openness to differing perspectives (Minson & Dorison, 2022), people want to confirm their beliefs to gain psychological comfort and stability.

The two configurations of C2 have information quality and social influence as core conditions. In this context, users may be unable to make decisions due to their negative emotions and require high-quality and socially influential information from mobile internet social media to assist in decision-making. Therefore, this study names C2a and C2b as social anchoring encountering, which resolve decision-making anxiety through high-quality, socially influential information. In this case, information with high social influence tends to appear in the most prominent position in mobile social media, which is the easiest for users to notice; and users will make social comparisons when they are in a low mood by engaging with socially influential information to find experiences or affects that are similar to their own, thus gaining a sense of belonging (Kósa & Balint, 2022).

The core conditions of C3 are information interestingness and personal cognition. This research takes C3 as mood relief encountering. This configuration reflects a cognitive consistency preference, in which users, driven by negative emotions, tend to select interesting information that fits their existing beliefs or knowledge frameworks, not only avoiding the additional stress of triggering cognitive conflict, but also avoiding the stress of having to deal with the negative emotions. This not only avoids the additional stress of triggering cognitive conflicts, but also provides users with a current state of positive emotions to briefly alleviate their long-term negative mood.

Overall, in a negative mood, mobile social media users' noticing of encountered information is characterized by complex diversity conditions. When in a negative mood, users become more demanding, especially in terms of information quality, information interest, social influence and personal cognition. Users tend to avoid further negative mood by rigorously screening information and are more likely to interpret information around them in a negative way, seeking high quality and authoritative information to cope with low moods. In addition, users in this mood pay attention to socially influential information in order to have social comparisons and a sense of belonging. At the same time, the role of personal cognition is particularly important at this point, as users tend to look for information that is consistent with their own beliefs in order to reduce the discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance.

5. Discussions

5.1 Conclusions

This study combines existing research on information encountering in mobile social media with seven variables from information factors, environmental factors, and personal factors, which have been confirmed to be positively correlated with information encountering in previous studies, and combines them with different moods to be analysed using fsQCA. The results of the study confirm remarkable differences between the configurations that influence users in different moods when they notice encountered information on mobile social media. In different moods, users' noticing and acceptance of information can change significantly, which is closely related to related communication theories. Specifically, when users are in a positive mood, they are more likely to notice the usefulness and ease-of-use information. This positive mood makes them more inclined to accept and use the information because they are more open and optimistic about processing new information; In a neutral mood, users focus on how interesting the information is, while showing a higher tolerance for their surroundings. They may analyse the content of the information in more detail rather than focusing solely on its functionality. This mood prompts users to think more comprehensively when receiving information, enabling them to assess the value of the information better; When users are in a negative mood, their focus on information becomes complex. Users are more concerned with multiple dimensions, such as the quality of the message, ease of use, social impact, and personal perceptions. Negative mood tends to make users more critical of information, and they may demand higher levels of authenticity and reliability. In this mood, users' decision-making process is influenced by more internal and external factors, leading them to show greater caution and selectivity in information acceptance. Therefore, mood not only affects

users' acceptance of information, but also changes the way they analyse and judge information. This phenomenon is well represented in related communication theories mentioned above, which emphasizes the important role of moods in the information processing process.

5.2 Implication

The above findings suggest that mood is not only a background variable but also a core regulator of information encountering. This finding has far-reaching implications for both theory development and platform practice in the following ways:

The findings of this study contribute to the field of information research in several key ways. First, it enriches the literature on information encountering by using mood as a prerequisite to explore the linkage of various factors during mobile social media browsing. Previous research has largely focused on the effects of encountered information on emotions, treating human emotional responses as outcomes rather than precursors of information encountering, and most studies have relied on structural equation modelling to examine the relationship between single factors and information encountering. Positive effects correlated with information encountering but fail to delve into more nuanced analyses (Baishya & Choudhury, 2023). By contrast, this study provides a more detailed exploration of how mood as a long-term emotion influences information encountering. In China, the popularity of mobile social media is exceptionally high, making in-depth research on this topic particularly relevant.

Second, while prior studies were often based on specific academic platforms or lacked platform specificity (Chen, 2021), this research expands the concept of information encountering to mobile social media. This broadens the scope of application and highlights the unique dynamics of information access on such platforms. Third, this study extends the applicability of communication theory. While earlier research emphasized differences in users' acceptance of information, few incorporated moods as an analytical condition. This approach introduces new perspectives and directions for communication.

The results confirm that users in different moods notice encountered information differently, and the factors influencing this noticing vary significantly. This underscores the value of further exploration. For mobile social media platforms, understanding user mood can enhance algorithmic recommendations. By tailoring content and comments to align with users' current moods, platforms can better target audiences and increase user engagement. Additionally, variations in users' sensitivity to advertisements across moods highlight opportunities to design more effective ad placements. For individual users, studying the relationship between mood and information encountering can aid in developing mood management strategies. By regulating their moods, individuals can optimize information acquisition and learning outcomes, which is vital for improving mental health, quality of life, and work efficiency.

5.3 Limitations

The present study also has limitations. Firstly, due to fewer related studies, this study adopts a simple division method in classifying moods, but whether there is a difference between the factors of noticing encountered information in different moods under more precise moods remains to be further investigated; secondly, the sample size of this study meets the requirements of the related literature on the sample size of the methodology of this study, but the population of China is huge, and whether it can still present consistency after enlarging the sample size still presents consistency remains to be explored; finally, due to China's Internet policy, the mobile Internet situation in China and other countries presents a huge difference, and whether the same analyses present differences in the results of other countries remains to be further investigated.

5.4 The Scope for Further Research

This study offers valuable insights into the relationship between information and mood on mobile social media among young Chinese people, highlighting directions for future research. First, the broadly defined mood categories require finer emotional classifications to explore their nuanced effects on information processing. Second, cross-cultural studies are needed to determine if findings apply beyond China, given global cultural differences. Third, the dynamic nature of social media necessitates longitudinal research to track how technological changes and user behaviour alter mood's impact on information access. Fourth, the intersection of affective science and technology presents opportunities to improve algorithmic recommendations by accounting for users' mood, enhancing satisfaction and engagement. While this study establishes a foundation, future research should address its limitations and examine mood's broader role in an increasingly interconnected digital environment.

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No additional data are available.

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Appendix A

| Construct and scale items | Mean | S.D. |
|--|------|-------|
| In Positive Mood: | | |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the quality of the information. | 5.77 | 0.909 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the usefulness of the information. | 5.23 | 1.213 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the interest of the information. | 5.45 | 1.241 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the ease-of-use of the information. | 5.38 | 1.320 |
| I notice information on mobile social media even when I'm in an environment I don't like. | 5.26 | 1.248 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the social influence of the information. | 5.31 | 1.275 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because the information meets my cognition. | 5.34 | 1.272 |
| In Neutral Mood: | | |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the quality of the information. | 5.44 | 1.083 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the usefulness of the information. | 5.27 | 1.259 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the interest of the information. | 5.31 | 1.312 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the ease-of-use of the information. | 5.37 | 1.363 |
| I notice information on mobile social media even when I'm in an environment I don't like. | 5.17 | 1.320 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the social influence of the information. | 5.37 | 1.260 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because the information meets my cognition. | 5.23 | 1.361 |
| In Negative Mood: | | |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the quality of the information. | 5.11 | 1.349 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the usefulness of the information. | 5.19 | 1.255 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the interest of the information. | 5.27 | 1.344 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the ease-of-use of the information. | 5.25 | 1.292 |
| I notice information on mobile social media even when I'm in an environment I don't like. | 5.01 | 1.499 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because of the social influence of the information. | 5.25 | 1.338 |
| I will notice information on mobile social media because the information meets my cognition. | 4.99 | 1.448 |

Figure II. Descriptive Analysis of Questionnaire