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THE IMPACT OF XIAOHONGSHU AS THE PRIMARY INFORMATION HUB: A CASE STUDY AMONG UTAR UNDERGRADUATES

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A RESEARCH PROJECT

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EU JIN HAU

APPROVAL FORM

This research paper attached hereto, entitled: **"THE IMPACT OF XIAOHONGSHU AS THE PRIMARY INFORMATION HUB: A CASE STUDY AMONG UTAR UNDERGRADUATES"** prepared and submitted by Eu Jin Hau in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Media & Creative Studies (Honours) is hereby accepted.

_____ Date: _____

Supervisor

Ms. Penny Lim Wai Ping

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the increasing popularity of Xiaohongshu (RedNote) as the primary information hub among Malaysian university students, indicating a behavioural shift away from traditional search engines like Google. Xiaohongshu, once a Chinese e-commerce and lifestyle platform, has transformed into a dynamic space for peer-generated content that combines community interaction, visual storytelling, and authenticity. According to Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), this study investigates how well the platform meets students' cognitive, affective, personal, social, and escapist needs. A qualitative case study approach was used, with a focus on a small group of five female undergraduate students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) who actively use Xiaohongshu. The study uses semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to explore how students use the platform for personal development, travel planning, beauty tips, lifestyle advice, and food recommendations. Interviewees rate Xiaohongshu as more relatable and engaging than Google, noting its visual content, user experiences, and community-driven feedback. Trust is established not through formal expertise, but rather through peer comments, relatable influencers, and perceived authenticity. While students appreciate the platform's speed, convenience, and emotional appeal, they remain concerned about the lack of professional verification, hidden advertising, and algorithmic repetition. Some users have taken on more critical behaviours, such as fact-checking and assessing creator credibility. This study highlights a broader shift in digital literacy, in which students actively engage with emotionally resonant and socially validated content rather than passively consuming it. The findings have practical implications for educators, marketers, and platform developers who want to tailor communication strategies to the preferences of young audiences. Understanding Xiaohongshu's influence is critical for navigating today's rapidly changing information landscape, in which social validation increasingly shapes trust, identity, and decision-making.

Keywords: Xiaohongshu, Social Proof, Digital Trust, Google, Uses and Gratification Theory

Subject Area Code: P87-96 Communication, Mass Media

DECLARATION

I declare that the material in this paper is a product of my own work, and that proper acknowledgement has been made in the references to all sources, whether printed, electronic, or personal.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	
IV	Independent Variables
DV	Dependent Variables
UGC	User Generated Content
UGT	Uses and Gratifications Theory

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the digital age, social media platforms have transformed the way individuals seek, consume, and share information. Particularly among younger demographics such as university students, social media is not only a tool for communication and entertainment but also a primary source of information across various domains including lifestyle, education, and health. With platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube dominating content sharing in the West, China-based platforms such as Xiaohongshu (also known as RedNote) are increasingly gaining traction among Malaysian users.

Xiaohongshu was originally launched as a platform to share product reviews and travel diaries, but it has since evolved into a hybrid social-commerce platform that allows users to discover, consume, and share content through short videos, images, and blog-style posts. Its algorithm-driven content feed and focus on authentic user-generated content have attracted a growing number of Malaysian users, particularly university students who find it useful for seeking peer opinions, lifestyle inspiration, academic tips, and personal development content (Hau, 2025).

Despite its rising popularity in Malaysia, limited academic attention has been given to Xiaohongshu's role as an information hub among university students. Much of the existing literature focuses on Western social media platforms, leaving a gap in understanding how non-Western platforms are influencing information-seeking behaviour. Moreover, while many studies have examined motivations for social media use in general, there is insufficient exploration into the specific gratifications sought from Xiaohongshu, particularly in the Malaysian higher education context.

This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which offers a valuable framework to understand why and how users actively engage with media to fulfil their various needs (Ungvarsky, J. 2020). Applying UGT in the context of Xiaohongshu can provide insights into the cognitive, emotional, and social gratifications that Malaysian university students seek

when using the platform for information purposes (Vinney, 2024). Understanding these patterns can also help educators, marketers, and policymakers design more effective communication strategies tailored to this demographic.

By focusing on Xiaohongshu's influence on Malaysian university students' information behaviour, this study aims to fill an important research gap and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of social media's evolving role in knowledge consumption.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The widespread shift away from traditional search engines like Google and towards social media platforms like Xiaohongshu reflects a larger change in how university students seek, evaluate, and consume information. While Google focuses on algorithmic rankings and formally sourced content, Xiaohongshu takes a more community-driven, visually appealing, and subjective approach to knowledge sharing. This raises important questions about how students distinguish between credible and non-credible information, especially when peer validation and visual appeal weigh more heavily on decisions than verified expertise (Ngu, 2024).

Although Xiaohongshu appears to meet students' needs for authenticity, relatability, and emotional connection, it remains unclear how these gratifications influence their reliance on the platform as a primary information source. It is unclear how features like user-generated content, influencer reviews, and community engagement affect students' daily decisions on everything from travel and lifestyle to learning and consumption habits. The scarcity of Malaysian-based research highlights the need to investigate these behaviours in a local university setting.

This study aims to bridge the gap by exploring the motivations and decision-making patterns of Malaysian university students who use and are influenced by Xiaohongshu. Based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), it investigates how students actively choose the platform to meet

cognitive, affective, and social needs, as well as how such usage patterns reflect larger trends in digital literacy and trust formation.

1.3 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: Why do university students prefer Xiaohongshu as a primary platform for information search?
- RQ2: How does the usage of Xiaohongshu influence your decision-making and behaviour as a student?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- To understand why university students, prefer Xiaohongshu over platforms like Google for finding information.
- To examine how Xiaohongshu's features (e.g., user reviews, trends, visuals) influence students' daily choices and behaviour

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the changing digital behaviour of university students, particularly considering the increasing adoption of Xiaohongshu as a preferred information platform. It emphasises the trend of students gravitating towards interactive, authentic, and visually appealing content. These insights are advantageous to numerous critical stakeholders:

- **Marketers**: This research assists brands in transitioning from hard-sell strategies to more organic, relatable approaches, such as tutorials, storytelling, and influencer collaborations, that more effectively engage young audiences on Xiaohongshu.
- **Educators**: Lecturers can enhance their teaching methods by applying Xiaohongshu's concise and visual content style, which is more engaging and aligned with the current information consumption habits of students.
- **Media and Creative Students**: A valuable model because contemporary audiences respond to content is provided by the platform. These methods can be studied and implemented by students to enhance their critical thinking, messaging, and creativity.
- **Researchers**: The results are relevant to broader discussions regarding the impact of social media on information consumption, learning habits, and trust, particularly in comparison to traditional platforms such as Google.

By examining this shift, the study provides a clearer view of how university students engage with digital platforms and how this influences their daily decisions in learning and communication.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study seeks to understand how university students, specifically female undergraduates at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), use Xiaohongshu as their primary platform for seeking lifestyle-related information. It investigates their motivations, search habits, trust assessments, and the platform's impact on their daily decisions such as dining, shopping, beauty routines, and academic planning.

The scope is limited to students aged 22 to 28 who use Xiaohongshu on a regular basis. The study employs a qualitative case study approach with in-depth interviews, providing rich, subjective insights into the use of Xiaohongshu in a specific academic and cultural context. The platform is examined through the lens of the Uses and Gratifications Theory to better understand the underlying needs that drive user engagement.

1.7 Definition of Keywords

Xiaohongshu (RedNote)

Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, is a Chinese social media and e-commerce platform that has swiftly developed into a prominent lifestyle community. Initiated in 2013, its primary objective was to function as a cross-border shopping guide, providing users with a platform to exchange product recommendations and shopping experiences (Hau, 2025). It gradually evolved into an extensive social network where users create content centred on lifestyle, travel, beauty, cuisine, and subjective experiences. Xiaohongshu's fundamental value, in contrast to conventional search engines such as Google, resides in its community-centric content, where peer endorsements and visual narratives profoundly impact users' purchasing and lifestyle choices.

The platform prioritises genuine user-generated content (UGC), enabling individuals to share individual experiences that are regarded as more relatable and credible than traditional advertisements. Visual components, including images and brief videos, predominate its interface, enhancing engagement and accessibility of information. The algorithm prioritises content quality and user engagement, facilitating the easy discovery of the most relevant and popular posts. This strategy has established Xiaohongshu as both a lifestyle application and a "visual search engine," especially for younger demographics in search of inspiration and guidance from authentic user experiences.

Social Proof

Social proof is a psychological and social phenomenon in which individuals assume that the actions or beliefs of others are indicative of the appropriate behaviour and subsequently conform to them. This concept, which was first introduced by Robert Cialdini in his book Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion, posits that individuals are more inclined to adopt and trust behaviours when they observe others engaging in them (Media Theory, 2024).

Social proof is evident on platforms such as Xiaohongshu through capabilities such as "likes,"

"comments," "shares," and the apparent number of followers. Users are more likely to have confidence in the efficacy of a product when they observe high engagement on a post, such as a beauty product that has received thousands of likes and positive reviews. Furthermore, user-generated content that incorporates personal testimonies and peer recommendations functions as a form of social validation, thereby bolstering trust in both the product and the platform. The substantial influence of community-driven content is underscored by the frequent use of social proof on Xiaohongshu to inform users' decisions regarding the acquisition of products, the planning of travel, or the adoption of lifestyle habits.

Digital Trust

Digital trust indicates the assurance users possess regarding the dependability, security, and integrity of online platforms and digital interactions. It includes aspects such as data privacy, content authenticity, and the perceived credibility of information disseminated through digital networks (Liaw, 2023). Within the framework of Xiaohongshu, digital trust is cultivated through user-generated content and communal endorsement, as opposed to conventional institutional authentication.

Users on Xiaohongshu utilise comments, likes, and engagement metrics to assess the credibility of posts. Influencers and prolific contributors with substantial followings and verified badges frequently function as reliable sources of information. Xiaohongshu's transparency in displaying user interactions enables users to evaluate the authenticity of reviews and recommendations, thereby augmenting their trust in the presented content. Although its advantages, issues such as covert advertisements and influencer partiality occasionally jeopardise digital trust, compelling users to verify information with alternative platforms like Google or Instagram.

Google

Google was initially created in 1998 as a search engine by Stanford University PhD students Larry Page and Sergey Brin with the goal of organising and making internet information more accessible (Hall & Hosch, 2024). The company made a name for itself with the revolutionary PageRank algorithm that it developed. It used user queries to determine the ranking of web pages. Because of this breakthrough, Google grew rapidly and surpassed all others in terms of global search engine usage by the early 2000s. Google has broadened its product offerings over the years to include Gmail, Google Maps, Android, YouTube, and more. The company has also ventured into artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, and hardware.

Alphabet Inc., Google's parent company, reorganised the search and advertising division in 2015 so that it could function independently of Google Ventures, which included initiatives in areas such as health technology (Verily) and self-driving cars (Waymo). Even though it has undergone some changes, Google is still at the centre of everything. The company is dedicated to shaping the future of technology and is at the forefront of innovations in digital advertising, mobile technology, and artificial intelligence.

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is a communication framework that underscores the active role of individuals in the selection and utilisation of media to fulfil specific needs and desires. UGT, which emerged in the 1940s and gained popularity in the 1970s because of the contributions of scholars such as Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, shifted the emphasis from the effects of media on individuals to the interactions between individuals and media (Ungvarsky, 2020).

UGT posits that media users are not passive consumers, but rather active interviewees who consciously select media sources that best meet their individual needs. Cognitive (information seeking), affective (emotional experiences), personal integrative (enhancing credibility and status),

social integrative (connecting with others), and escapism (diversion from reality) are among the various dimensions into which these needs can be classified.

In today's diverse and interactive media landscape, UGT is particularly pertinent due to its emphasis on the motivations behind media consumption, which offers a unique perspective on the ways in which individuals interact with various media platforms.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

With an eye towards Xiaohongshu specifically, this chapter investigates how digital platforms might shape information-seeking behaviour and decision-making processes. It looks at how college students use visual storytelling, subjective experiences, and peer reviews, along with other online materials, to direct their daily decisions. Reviewing current studies on digital behaviour, social media's impact, and Xiaohongshu's growing influence helps this chapter to expose how students interact with and view digital information. The chapter also presents the conceptual framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which clarifies why university students consult Xiaohongshu to meet their informational needs. It also points up areas of present research lacking and suggests a conceptual model to show how platform characteristics affect student behaviour.

2.1 Xiaohongshu's Unique Value Proposition

Through its unique integration of user-generated content (UGC) and seamless e-commerce, Xiaohongshu distinguishes itself in the competitive social commerce ecosystem of China. This distinctive model allows users, primarily young, urban Chinese women, to share subjective experiences, reviews, and lifestyle content, thereby transforming everyday consumers into key opinion consumers (Yi & Xian, 2024).

Xiaohongshu establishes a community by focusing on authentic, experience-based content, in contrast to conventional e-commerce platforms that emphasise transactional relationships. Users establish a sense of trust and social validation by engaging with posts that align with their values and preferences (Liu, Yu, & Zhang, 2022). Reviews from peers are seen as more relatable and

trustworthy compared to traditional ads, particularly by younger people who grew up with digital technology (Zhou, 2024).

Xiaohongshu's algorithm prioritises content quality and relevance over promotional intent, thereby facilitating the organic discovery of new products and trends. Subsequently, it is increasingly perceived as a lifestyle search engine rather than merely a shopping tool (Zhang, Cai, Shi, & Li, 2024). Additionally, its user-friendly interface enables users to smoothly transition from browsing to purchasing within the same environment, thereby reducing friction, and boosting conversion rates (He, Qian, & Qiu, 2024).

The platform prioritises micro-influencers and genuine user experiences over celebrity endorsements, thereby preserving authenticity and reducing obstacles to content creation. The democratisation of influence fosters a sustainable and engaging content ecosystem (Yi & Xian, 2024).

Xiaohongshu's distinctive value proposition is rooted in its community-oriented model, which combines genuine social interaction with a seamless shopping experience. Its capacity to cultivate consumer trust, enable lifestyle exploration, and enhance peer influence establishes it as a frontrunner in social commerce innovation.

2.2 Frequent Usage of Xiaohongshu

Xiaohongshu is a popular social media platform in Malaysia, particularly among university students. These platform users consider the platform to be a daily necessity, and their frequency of use may be higher than that of other social media platforms. There are factors that contributed to the high usage frequency.

Wei and Tinmaz (2024) conducted a survey of 531 university students in a second-tier Chinese city, revealing that product type, trust, interactivity, and content quality all have a significant impact on students' Xiaohongshu consumption behaviour. These factors contribute to the platform's popularity among students seeking lifestyle advice and product recommendations. The frequency of Xiaohongshu usage is closely related to the specific needs and gratifications that users seek. Users frequently visit Xiaohongshu for practical advice and recommendations on a variety of topics, including fashion, beauty, and lifestyle.

The platform's visually rich and emotionally engaging content, such as short videos and aesthetically curated images, satisfies users' emotional needs. Users express their identity and gain recognition within digital communities by creating content and interacting with influencers, meeting their need for self-improvement and credibility.

Xiaohongshu emphasises peer-based recommendations and community discussions to foster a sense of belonging and trust among users. Users frequently interact with the platform during leisure time, treating it as a form of digital relaxation that combines utility and entertainment. These motivations are consistent with the findings of Qin et al. (2024), who suggest that university students frequently access Xiaohongshu during breaks and leisure time, using the platform as a form of digital relaxation.

2.3 Platform Interaction

To comprehend the appeal of Xiaohongshu among young users, platform interaction is essential. In contrast to conventional search engines that provide passive information retrieval, Xiaohongshu encourages active engagement by incorporating features such as visual search, interactive comments, personalised recommendations, and community-driven content. Lian et al. (2021) emphasises that Xiaohongshu has fostered a participatory culture, particularly among female users, by prioritising user-generated content and community engagement.

This participatory environment is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that users actively choose media platforms that satisfy psychological and social requirements. Xiaohongshu's visual-first interface and short-form content formats, according to (Xu & Bailey, 2024), significantly increase user engagement by satisfying both affective and cognitive needs. Consequently, the platform is particularly appealing for lifestyle decision-making. User interactions also contribute to the development of trust on the platform. Wu et al. (2023) observe that interactions such as commenting, sharing, and following contribute to the development of trust among users, as these activities create a sense of community validation and social proof.

Nevertheless, the algorithmic curation of content can result in echo chambers, which restricts users' access to a variety of viewpoints. Chueca (2024) examine the potential for personalised algorithms on platforms such as Xiaohongshu to reinforce pre-existing preferences, thereby restricting users' perspectives. In general, the interactive features of Xiaohongshu not only enable gratification-driven usage but also play a crucial role in the development of user trust, decision-making, and content relevance in the digital era.

2.4 Content Consumption in Xiaohongshu

Xiaohongshu's content consumption is shaped by users' preferences for visually engaging, user-generated, and emotionally resonant content, setting it apart from traditional information platforms such as Google. Rather than passively consuming text-heavy materials, users interact with short videos, image-based storytelling, and personal narratives that reflect their real-life experiences. According to Wang and Huang (2022), users on Xiaohongshu are heavily influenced by digital influencers with informational and referent power, which drives deeper engagement and encourages further content participation and sharing through perceived authenticity and expertise.

Xiaohongshu users frequently engage in non-linear browsing behaviours, entering content loops through hashtags or algorithmic suggestions rather than structured search, which promotes exploratory and curiosity-driven consumption. Furthermore, a study conducted by Wei and Tinmaz (2024) on Chinese university students found that the quality of visual content, emotional

relatability, and interactivity on Xiaohongshu have a significant impact on consumption behaviour and satisfaction, particularly for product recommendations and lifestyle inspiration. However, this method of content consumption is not without drawbacks. Chueca (2024) cautioned that algorithmic personalisation on such platforms can result in echo chambers, reinforcing existing preferences while limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. Despite this, users are increasingly using critical literacy strategies like reading comments, cross-referencing other platforms, and questioning influencer credibility. Overall, consumption behaviour on Xiaohongshu demonstrates a shift towards more socially validated, visually immersive, and emotionally charged digital experiences.

2.5 Digital Trust & Credibility in Xiaohongshu

Digital trust and credibility are critical factors influencing user participation on social media sites. Xiaohongshu has evolved as a popular social commerce platform in China, combining user-generated content (UGC) and e-commerce features. The platform's emphasis on legitimate information and peer reviews has been critical in fostering user confidence.

Zhu et al. (2024) investigated the impact of Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs) on Xiaohongshu and discovered that KOC perceptions greatly increase consumer trust by decreasing perceived risks. Their research found that KOCs function as trusted sources of information by authentically sharing subjective experiences, positively affecting customer behaviour.

Likewise, Tian et al. (2021) examined online review comments on Xiaohongshu and discovered that users favour detailed and genuine content. Their findings imply that the richness and authenticity of user evaluations help to build the platform's credibility, influencing users' trust and decision-making processes.

Furthermore, Liu Yuxi (2023) conducted research on Xiaohongshu's online marketing strategy and

identified issues connected to trust and clarity in marketing content. The study emphasised the necessity for the platform to strengthen content monitoring and diversify its offers to preserve and boost consumer trust.

In addition, Yimin Meng (2022) evaluated the effect of the number of likes on the perceived reliability of Xiaohongshu posts. The study revealed that, while many likes can increase perceived credibility, the absence of such metrics does not significantly reduce trust, demonstrating that users rely on a variety of variables to determine content trustworthiness.

In combination, these studies highlight the significance of real, user-generated content and transparent interactions in building digital trust on Xiaohongshu. The platform's design, which fosters deep personal disclosure and community involvement, is critical in building trust among its users.

2.6 The Role of User-Generated Content (UGC) on Xiaohongshu

User-generated content (UGC) is pivotal in influencing decision-making on Xiaohongshu, especially among young, digitally savvy consumers who value authenticity and peer recommendations. User-generated content on the platform encompasses reviews, tutorials, testimonials, and lifestyle narratives created by ordinary users rather than professional marketers or organisations. These organic content forms function as both informational signals and persuasive stimuli that profoundly affect user judgement and behaviour.

Qin et al. (2024) assert that the format and presentation of user-generated content (UGC) directly influence consumer decision-making outcomes. Their research revealed that short-form videos, owing to their rich audiovisual attributes, augment emotional engagement and understanding, rendering them more effective in swaying purchasing intentions than static posts. The popularity

of mini-vlogs, "before-and-after" product reviews, and lifestyle snippets that incorporate product usage into daily situations is evident on Xiaohongshu.

Furthermore, the credibility and perceived utility of user-generated content have been shown to enhance trust in decision-making. Jia et al. (2023) highlighted those reviews regarded as genuine, particularly those featuring personal narratives or visual evidence, are more likely to influence consumer decisions. Xiaohongshu users frequently depend on comment sections and engagement metrics, including likes and shares, to evaluate the credibility of a post prior to making decisions about food, beauty, health, or travel.

The platform's design enhances the decision-making impact of user-generated content by incorporating peer recommendations into search results and personalised feeds. Dang (2024) indicated that, within a Malaysian context, young adults frequently give up on conventional search engines in favour of Xiaohongshu for lifestyle decisions, attributing this preference to the platform's perceived relatability and community-oriented framework. This underscores that contemporary decision-making is not exclusively founded on objective data but is increasingly influenced by experiential, peer-derived narratives.

In summary, user-generated content on Xiaohongshu serves as a vital informational and social resource that influences user decisions. Its impact is facilitated by content format, credibility, social validation, and the emotionally impactful experiences conveyed by other users. Consequently, UGC converts decision-making from an individual cognitive endeavour into a socially integrated, community-influenced process.

2.7 Conceptual Framework – Uses & Gratification Theory

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Uses & Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), originally proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), provides a foundational framework for understanding why individuals actively seek specific media to satisfy needs. In contrast to traditional passive audience models, UGT positions users as active agents who deliberately select media platforms based on the gratifications they expect to obtain (Vinney, 2024). This theory has been extensively applied to studies of social media and digital behaviour, offering insights into how different platforms address users' cognitive, emotional, social, and escapist requirements.

In the context of Xiaohongshu, UGT is particularly relevant due to the platform's fusion of social media and user-generated content with lifestyle-oriented information. University students increasingly turn to Xiaohongshu not merely for entertainment, but also for practical guidance on personal development, consumption decisions, travel, health, and more. Unlike traditional search engines like Google, which present impersonal, algorithmically ranked results, Xiaohongshu offers peer-generated content grounded in personal experience, community validation, and visual storytelling. This aligns well with the premise of UGT, as students choose platforms that fulfil both their informational and psychological needs (Dang, 2024).

NEED TYPE	DESCRIPTION	MEDIA EXAMPLES
Cognitive	Acquiring information, knowledge, comprehension	Documentaries, historic films, news etc.
Affective	Emotional, pleasant, or aesthetic experience	Romantic movies, soap operas, sitcoms etc.
Personal integrative	Enhancing credibility, confidence, and status	Tutorials on Public Speaking etc.
Social integrative	Enhancing connections with family, friends, and so forth	Social Media
Tension release	Escape and diversion	Movies, Social Media, Music etc.

Figure 2: Uses and Gratification Theory's needs (Neagoe,2020)

Several studies highlight how Xiaohongshu serves multiple gratifications across five key dimensions outlined by UGT: **cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and escapism** (Liu, Yu, & Zhang, 2022). The platform addresses **cognitive needs** by providing accessible and firsthand knowledge in areas such as food, lifestyle, and education. Posts are often composed of real-life experiences, enabling users to gain practical insights that are more contextually relevant than conventional sources (Dang, 2024).

In terms of **affective needs**, Xiaohongshu appeals through visually rich, emotionally engaging content, such as short videos and aesthetically curated images, which users find more stimulating than text-based results on search engines. Influencer storytelling on the platform adds an emotional layer to otherwise mundane information, transforming search behaviour into an immersive experience (Qin et al., 2024).

The platform also satisfies **personal integrative needs**, allowing users to express their identity and gain recognition within digital communities. Through content creation, interaction with influencers, and participation in discussions, users reinforce self-concept and digital presence, thereby fulfilling their need for self-enhancement and credibility (Yi & Xian, 2024).

Social integrative needs are met through the platform's emphasis on peer-based recommendations, community discussions, and interactive comment sections. The perceived authenticity of user experiences and the value placed on peer feedback create a sense of belonging and trust that is less prominent on platforms like Google (Zhou et al., 2023).

Finally, Xiaohongshu serves an **escapist function** by offering content that is not only informative but also recreational. Users often engage with the platform during moments of leisure, using it as a form of digital relaxation. The blend of utility and entertainment provides a stress-relieving experience that encourages prolonged engagement (Dang, 2024).

Thus, by applying the UGT framework, the present study conceptualizes Xiaohongshu usage as the independent variable, encompassing frequency of use, content type, and engagement behaviour. The dependent variables are the outcomes of this interaction, including enhanced decision-making, trust development, and emotional gratification. UGT serves as the theoretical bridge between students' media habits and their decision-making processes in the digital age.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

In research, research methodology is the methodical procedures and tools applied to find, gather, evaluate, and interpret data concerning a given research topic. It covers several aspects, including research design, data collecting strategies, data analysis approaches, and the general framework the study is carried out inside (Sreekumar, 2023). The selection of an appropriate methodology is essential, as it directly impacts the validity and reliability of the findings, thereby ensuring the effective achievement of research objectives. Research methodology, through the establishment of clear methods and structured procedures, facilitates the generation of credible and replicable results, thereby enhancing the robustness of academic and scientific studies.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a methodological approach aimed at investigating and comprehending intricate real-world phenomena through a detailed analysis of individuals' experiences, perceptions, and behaviours. In contrast to quantitative research, which emphasises numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research seeks to address "how" and "why" questions, offering profound insights into the underlying motivations and contextual factors of a phenomenon (Tenny et al., 2022).

This methodology is especially beneficial for examining subjects with limited knowledge or necessitating a profound comprehension of human experiences. Researchers frequently utilise methods including interviews, focus groups, observations, and content analysis to gather comprehensive, descriptive data that uncover patterns, themes, and insights.

Utilising open-ended enquiries and interactive dialogues allows interviewees to articulate their thoughts and viewpoints freely, facilitating a more nuanced comprehension of the research subject.

Qualitative research not only facilitates the generation of hypotheses for subsequent investigation but also provides essential context to quantitative results. It may be executed as an independent study to investigate novel concepts or incorporated into mixed-methods research to provide a more holistic perspective on intricate issues. The method's adaptability and focus on authentic environments render it an effective instrument for encapsulating the intricacies and profundities of actual experiences.

3.3 Qualitative Interview

The choice to utilise **qualitative interviews** as the principal data collection method in this study is motivated by the necessity for a more profound comprehension of university students' information-seeking behaviours on Xiaohongshu. In contrast to quantitative methods that prioritise statistical analysis, qualitative interviews facilitate a more nuanced exploration of subjective experiences, motivations, and perceptions. This is especially important for comprehending how Xiaohongshu has impacted students' daily decision-making and moulded their digital consumption patterns, as emphasised in the research questions.

Qualitative interviews enable open-ended discussions, allowing interviewees to articulate their lived experiences and contemplate the motivations for their platform selections. This corresponds with the **Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)** framework employed in this study, which highlights the comprehension of users' motivations and the gratification they obtain from media consumption. UGT asserts that individuals deliberately choose media platforms to satisfy cognitive, emotional, and social requirements. A qualitative approach is imperative to elucidate the intricacies of these motivations. Interviewees can elucidate how Xiaohongshu's distinctive attributes, including user-generated content, visual storytelling, and community engagement, fulfil their informational requirements in a manner that diverges from traditional search engines like Google.

The selection of qualitative interviews is warranted by the exploratory character of the research. As Xiaohongshu becomes an essential information source for university students, qualitative

interviews allow the researcher to explore the underlying motivations and personal interpretations that influence this transition. These insights transcend basic usage statistics, providing a profound comprehension of how Xiaohongshu's platform design affects students' trust, decision-making, and daily routines. This level of exploration would be difficult to attain solely through quantitative surveys, which are frequently limited by predetermined response options and lack contextual richness.

Moreover, qualitative interviews facilitate interviewee-driven exploration, enabling students to articulate the elements of Xiaohongshu that align with their firsthand experiences. This open format is essential for recognising emerging themes and unforeseen insights, which can enhance the understanding of Xiaohongshu's influence on information-seeking behaviours. Considering the study's emphasis on lived experiences and personal reflections, qualitative interviews represent the most suitable methodology to elucidate the intricate ways in which Xiaohongshu influences users' perceptions and behaviours.

This study utilises qualitative interviews to deliver a comprehensive, narrative-based analysis of Xiaohongshu's impact, providing stakeholders such as educators, marketers, and platform developers with essential insights into university students' engagement with digital information within a social media-centric environment. This method aligns with the study's exploratory objectives and enhances its contribution to the broader comprehension of digital media consumption patterns among young adults.

3.4 Case Study Approach in Qualitative Research

The case study approach is a qualitative research method that entails conducting an in-depth, detailed examination of a single case or a small group of related cases in their real-world context (Priya, 2020). It is especially useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon under investigation and the context in which it happens are not clearly defined. Case studies are frequently used to investigate complex social phenomena, providing rich and comprehensive insights into the behaviours, experiences, and interactions of individuals or groups. This method

is ideal for answering "how" and "why" questions because it allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon in its natural setting while utilising multiple sources of evidence.

In this study, the case corresponds to a particular group: female undergraduate students at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) who use Xiaohongshu. The case study method was chosen because the research interviewees are restricted to this well-defined and context-specific population. Because all interviewees come from the same university, the study naturally fits the definition of a bounded case. This allows for a more in-depth examination of their digital habits and the role that Xiaohongshu plays in their daily information-seeking and decision-making processes. By narrowing the scope, the research becomes more detailed and consistent, allowing for a more accurate interpretation of shared experiences, motivations, and digital habits within a common academic and cultural context.

Furthermore, the case study approach is consistent with the theoretical framework that underpins this research: the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). UGT views media users as active agents who choose media platforms to meet specific needs, including cognitive (information-seeking), affective (emotional satisfaction), personal integrative (self-confidence, credibility), social integrative (community interaction), and escapist (entertainment and diversion) gratifications. This study uses the case study method to investigate how Xiaohongshu's specific features, such as visual content, peer-based recommendations, algorithm-driven feeds, and real-time user interactions, address these needs differently than traditional platforms like Google.

By combining a case study approach with UGT, this study not only reveals what students do on Xiaohongshu but also investigates why they do it and how the platform fulfils their individual and social motivations. This methodological choice allows the researcher to produce context-rich, theory-informed insights that highlight changing digital behaviours among university students.

3.5 Location of the Study

The interviewees' availability and time restrictions will determine whether the research will be conducted in person at UTAR or Zoom.

3.6 Population & Sampling

The population of this study is composed of female university students between the ages of 22 and 28 who are active users of Xiaohongshu, a social commerce platform that is increasing in popularity. The reason for the selection of this demographic is its noteworthy influence on consumer decision-making and its high engagement with digital platforms. Xiaohongshu's platform is particularly popular among young women who are actively engaged in fashion insights, beauty trends, and lifestyle discussions, as evidenced by the fact that approximately 88% of its users are female (Ngu, 2024). Comprehending their interaction with Xiaohongshu offers valuable insights into the platform's mechanisms for sustained user engagement and trust-building.

The interviewees who satisfy the criteria of being high-frequency users of Xiaohongshu are selected using a **purposive sampling method**. This research is well-suited to this non-probability sampling technique, as it concentrates on individuals who have specific knowledge and experience that are pertinent to the study's purpose. The importance of purposive sampling for exploratory studies was underscored by Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), who emphasised that it allows researchers to intentionally select interviewees who can provide detailed and rich information.

Five interviewees are chosen based on their familiarity with Xiaohongshu's content ecosystem, engagement with platform features, and active usage patterns. Demographic data supports the decision to concentrate solely on female users, as women comprise the majority of the platform's user base. The research can investigate the motivations, beliefs, and experiences that contribute to their continuous use of the platform through this targeted selection. By conducting a comprehensive examination of the behaviours and perceptions of these users, the study endeavours to identify the critical factors that influence trust and drive platform loyalty among female university students.

3.8 Instruments

I develop an interview protocol in Word and pose questions during in-person or Zoom meetings. The interview will conclude upon obtaining of the necessary information. I am the sole research instrument in this research. This implies that I am directly accountable for the execution of the interviews, the direction of the dialogue, the interpretation of participant responses, and the adaptation of follow-up questions in real-time.

3.9 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis, a qualitative methodology that is optimal for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within the data, will be implemented to analyse the data collected from the interviewees. This approach is particularly effective in comprehending the trust factors, motivations, and user experiences that are linked to Xiaohongshu. Thematic analysis enables researchers to systematically investigate qualitative data to identify the primary themes that emerge from the responses of interviewees.

Rather than merely summarising the information that interviewees shared, thematic analysis delves deeper into the data to identify underlying patterns and connections, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how users experience and perceive the platform (Ho., 2020a). This procedure is analogous to the process of assembling clues from raw, unstructured information to develop a comprehensive comprehension of user engagement motivations and behaviours. The analysis seeks to emphasise the shared experiences and the reasons for users' ongoing trust and loyalty to Xiaohongshu by carefully coding and categorising interview transcripts.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction of Interviewees

This study's interviewees are five female university students from **Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman's (UTAR) Media and Creative Studies** course. The following table contains information about the interviewees for the research findings.

Interviewees	**I1**	**I2**	**I3**	**I4**	**I5**
Age	22	26	22	22	28
Course	Media & Creative Studies	Media & Creative Studies	Media & Creative Studies	Media & Creative Studies	Media & Creative Studies
Year & Semester	Year 3 Semester 3	Year 3 Semester 3	Year 3 Semester 3	Year 3 Semester 3	Year 3 Semester 3
Nationality	Malaysian	Malaysian	Malaysian	Malaysian	China
Usage Frequency	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily
Started Using Since	2021	2020	2020	2020	2021

One distinguishing feature of these interviewees is their frequent use of Xiaohongshu, a popular social commerce platform in Asia. Each of them spends time browsing and interacting on Xiaohongshu every day, so they are familiar with the platform's features and community-driven content. Their consistent engagement with Xiaohongshu provides valuable insights into user behaviour, trust factors, and the reasons for long-term platform loyalty. Being a part of a media-focused course enhances their understanding of digital trends, making their perspectives extremely relevant to this research.

4.1 Findings

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Q1: How frequent do you use Xiaohongshu and what's the main reason for using it each time?

All five interviewees indicated daily utilisation of Xiaohongshu, underscoring the platform's significant incorporation into their daily lives. Although they utilise the platform with similar frequency, their motivations for engagement reveal a varied spectrum of needs, encompassing relaxation, entertainment, and purposeful information retrieval.

I1 stated that she utilises Xiaohongshu daily for approximately one hour or more. For her, the platform functions as both a means of relaxation and a repository of information. Xiaohongshu serves as her preferred application for relaxation and the exploration of valuable insights, whether she is engaging in casual browsing or seeking specific information.

Conversely, **I2** characterised her usage as more purpose oriented. In contrast to conventional social media platforms, she peruses out of boredom, she engages with Xiaohongshu solely with a specific intention. For instance, she frequently employs it to identify quality dining establishments, organise travel locations, or even for nocturnal meditation practices. She perceives Xiaohongshu not merely as a platform for casual entertainment, but as a problem-solving instrument that aids her in decision-making and uncovering practical information. She noted that when gossip or trending news appears on her homepage, she occasionally clicks on it out of curiosity. This indicates that although her main usage is intentional, she occasionally interacts with trending content if it piques her interest.

I3 reported utilising Xiaohongshu daily for over three hours, rendering her the most frequent user among the interviewees. Her primary motivations for utilising the platform are entertainment and the pursuit of information, specifically regarding makeup techniques and lifestyle strategies. She highlighted that Xiaohongshu's community-oriented sharing enables her to uncover genuine advice

and real-life experiences from fellow users, which she considers more trustworthy than conventional advertisements.

I4 indicated that she utilises Xiaohongshu daily, irrespective of her location. She frequently accesses the app during moments of inactivity or when uncertain about dining options. Xiaohongshu serves as a reliable resource for her in discovering quality food choices and lifestyle suggestions, rendering it an indispensable instrument for daily decision-making.

I5, the sole international student in the group, indicated that she peruses Xiaohongshu daily. Her motivations encompass both leisure activities and the pursuit of information. This underscores the platform's function not merely as a social media application but as a multifaceted resource for uncovering ideas and solutions.

The interviewees' responses indicate that Xiaohongshu transcends mere casual browsing, functioning as a multifaceted tool that facilitates decision-making, relaxation, and knowledge acquisition. Xiaohongshu functions as a dependable resource for trip planning, discovering local cuisine, and acquiring makeup techniques in daily life.

Q2: What types of information do you typically search for on Xiaohongshu?

The interviewees mentioned that they use Xiaohongshu to look up a lot of different information, mostly based on their personal interests and what they need in their daily lives. The platform's community-driven content and visually appealing interface make it a great option for finding food recipes, lifestyle tips, travel recommendations, beauty tutorials, and personal interests.

I1 said that she frequently looks for recipes, particularly ones about cooking and food preparation. Also, she likes to watch ASMR eating videos and look at shopping recommendations, where

influencers talk about their latest finds and product reviews. Her searches mainly focus on food and consumer products, showing what she's interested in for her lifestyle.

I2 discussed a wider variety of search topics. When I plan a trip or visit novel places, I use Xiaohongshu to check out local attractions, read hotel reviews, and get food recommendations. She regularly checks out specific content creators for meditation, which she does every night. Also, she uses the platform to learn photography skills and, at one point, even used it to get better at her English. This highlights how Xiaohongshu serves not only as a leisure app but also as a tool for learning and personal growth for her.

I3 uses Xiaohongshu with a clear goal in mind. She looks for answers when she faces challenges, whether it's about study materials, makeup tips, or finding creative ideas. If she's looking for design ideas for posters or makeup techniques, she thinks Xiaohongshu is super helpful for practical guides and innovative ideas.

I4 shared that her primary searches include finding restaurant recommendations, discovering travel spots, and looking up healthy meal preparations. She frequently searches for recipes for low-fat meals and uses Xiaohongshu to pick up cooking techniques. The platform is her favourite place to find out not only where to eat but also how to make healthy meals quickly.

I5 uses it a bit differently, mainly for celebrity news and sharing personal interests. She mentioned that her feed is full of posts about her favourite idols and painting tutorials, showing what she really likes. She mentioned that the platform's algorithm tends to show her more of the content she engages with, which keeps her interested in similar posts as time goes on.

The responses from the interviewees show that Xiaohongshu is not just a social media platform; it acts as a search engine for lifestyle inspiration, practical guides, and personal hobbies. Xiaohongshu has become super helpful for discovering new skills, cooking recipes, travel spots, and makeup tips in everyday life.

Q3: How do you usually go about searching for information on Xiaohongshu?

All five interviewees mentioned that they mainly use keyword searches to find the information they need on Xiaohongshu. The way they search shows what they're interested in and how well the platform can provide relevant results from basic queries.

I1 mentioned that when she's looking for something specific, she just types the relevant keywords into the search bar on Xiaohongshu. By using specific keywords, she can quickly find the content that fits her needs, helping her to easily sort outposts that aren't relevant. Her search process is simple, focussing on finding the information she needs without any distractions.

I2 adopts a somewhat more organised method. She begins her search for information with relevant terms, but she frequently finds latest content through suggestions from friends and family. If her sister or friends recommend a specific content creator, she tends to follow that creator to stay updated regularly. She also said that for some knowledge-based subjects, such as learning English, she likes to stick with certain influencers regularly, which helps her to gradually build on her understanding. This approach allows her to stay focused on her learning path on the platform.

I3 highlighted how much she depends on keywords too. She gave examples like looking up makeup techniques, for instance, "how to contour your nose," by just entering the main steps into the search bar. This method allows her to quickly locate specific tutorials and tips, which fits well with her purposeful use of Xiaohongshu.

I4 often uses searches based on specific terms to find information, particularly when looking into subjects such as low-fat meal recipes. She enters specific phrases such as "best low-fat meals" or "meal prep ideas" and immediately receives a variety of suggestions. The search function on the platform is helpful for finding recommended dishes and cooking methods, making it easier for her to decide what to make.

I5 had a similar habit of searching for keywords but really concentrated on beauty and skincare products. She explained how she uses specific phrases like "top skincare brands," "skincare product reviews," or "best oil-control products" to refine her search results. Her focused use of

keywords helps her find relevant content, making it simpler to locate what she needs without a lot of extra scrolling.

In general, all five interviewees showed a clear and effective way of looking for information on Xiaohongshu. By using keywords and content from trusted creators, they can easily find reliable and relevant information, improving their experience and making the platform more useful.

Q4: What do you notice about the way information is presented on Xiaohongshu?

The interviewees noticed that Xiaohongshu presents information in a way that really focusses on the community and has a strong visual, which sets it apart from regular search engines. The platform is built around firsthand experiences, practical sharing, and visual storytelling, making it really appealing for users who are looking for genuine insights.

I1 pointed out that Xiaohongshu is a platform where users really share their individual opinions and experiences, particularly regarding product recommendations and travel tips. She thinks that Xiaohongshu is a trustworthy source for planning trips and making buying choices because a lot of users share their detailed experiences. She also emphasised how crucial it is to conduct personal research, since opinions can differ, and what works for one individual may not necessarily work for someone else.

I2 thinks the platform is helpful for finding information, especially since it's mostly in Chinese, which makes it easier for users like her. She follows content creators who focus on meditation and travel, relying on their content after having positive experiences with it multiple times. She pointed out a downside: when searching for food spots or local attractions, she often notices that the recommendations tend to be repetitive and a bit mainstream, missing unique or hidden gems. Now, she makes sure to look closely at the comment sections for genuine user feedback before deciding anything. She realises that this is one of Xiaohongshu's strengths, since the comments are often honest and uncover issues that the main posts might overlook.

I3 explained that Xiaohongshu is a platform centred around sharing, highlighting its focus on

practical and educational content. She really likes how people share tutorials and step-by-step guides, like makeup techniques or study materials, which she finds super helpful and easy to follow. She believes that the platform focusses more on education and knowledge sharing instead of just being for entertainment.

I4 mentioned that she likes Xiaohongshu's way of presenting information more than traditional search engines such as Google. She said that Google shows information in a list format, but Xiaohongshu presents it with visual posts that include images and videos, which makes it easier to understand and more interesting. For instance, when she looks up healthy meal recipes, she discovers not just written instructions but also videos that show the cooking process, which she thinks are better for learning.

I5 offered a unique viewpoint, highlighting that Xiaohongshu's algorithm often leads to the formation of echo chambers. She mentioned that after she engages with certain types of content, such as celebrity updates or technology news, her feed slowly starts to fill up with those topics, which makes it difficult to find other kinds of information. She said that this limited content exposure sometimes makes it hard for her to discover new interests beyond her usual searches.

In whole, the interviewees thought that Xiaohongshu's visual and community-focused approach makes it engaging and useful for learning and discovering new things. But the way it uses algorithms can sometimes make the content feel repetitive, sticking to what users already like and do over time.

Q5: How do you decide which posts or content to trust for the information you need?

When it comes to trusting the content on Xiaohongshu, the interviewees shared various strategies for figuring out what’s credible, mainly looking at comments, how real the users seem, and checking for verification.

I1 mentioned that her initial step is to look at the comments, whether they're positive or negative, to assess how genuine the post is. She really pays attention to posts that look too promotional or

have comments that seem too perfect, as those can sometimes suggest fake accounts or ads. To make sure she isn't misled, she checks the profiles of people who comment, confirming they are real users and not just bots. If she still has doubts, she will check the information on other platforms such as Instagram or Facebook to confirm the claims, rather than just depending on Xiaohongshu.

I2 has a unique way of doing things. As she goes through the comments, she notices that the content on Xiaohongshu can be subjective, particularly when it comes to more specialised topics like makeup or meditation. She noted that, in contrast to Google, which features expert articles or certified professionals sharing information, Xiaohongshu is mostly populated with individual opinions from non-professionals. This sets up a situation where users need to pick a side and figure out which creator's viewpoint they believe in. When it comes to general experiences such as food or travel, she thinks it's easier to rely on user feedback. However, for more technical or health-related subjects, she feels that Xiaohongshu doesn't have enough professional credibility.

I3 relies a lot on comments to assess how trustworthy a post is. She knows that a lot of posts are sponsored or paid ads, so she digs into the comment section to find genuine user experiences. When it comes to restaurant recommendations, she goes the extra mile by looking up the place herself to see if it’s good or just getting a lot of hype on Xiaohongshu.

I4 looks at how content performs by checking its engagement metrics, including likes, comments, and the amount of positive feedback it gets. She thinks that when a post gets a lot of likes and positive comments, it's about 80% dependable. She checks out the comments to find out if people are really sharing good experiences, which helps her figure out if the information is trustworthy.

I5 really focuses on making sure accounts are credible and verified. She looks at things like follower count, views, and the official verification badges from Xiaohongshu to gauge trustworthiness. If an account is labelled as a certified creator or a professional, like a doctor or a public figure, she tends to trust the content more. For her, getting official verification is important for telling apart real content from posts that might be misleading.

The interviewees focus on comments, user authenticity, engagement metrics, and verification

badges to help them identify trustworthy information and separate it from potentially misleading content. Their insights show that they really take the time to double-check and confirm the information before believing it, highlighting a thoughtful and careful way of using social media.

Q6: What factors lead you to choose Xiaohongshu over other platforms like Google when looking for information?

Whenever selecting between Xiaohongshu and other platforms such as Google, the interviewees pointed out a few reasons that make Xiaohongshu their top pick, mainly emphasising convenience, visual content, and authenticity.

I1 mentioned that she usually turns to Google or other platforms as backup options when she has doubts about the content on Xiaohongshu. She notices that Google frequently doesn't provide detailed or niche information, which makes it more challenging to locate the specific things she's searching for. Xiaohongshu is easier for her to use, and it has a lot more user-shared experiences, even for those rare or unique topics. She tends to prefer it because she's used to searching on Xiaohongshu.

I2 pointed out that what makes Xiaohongshu attractive is its visual presentation. She thinks that images and videos really make information more interesting and easier to understand, especially when you look at the text-heavy results on Google. She observed that younger audiences tend to prefer shorter texts and are more attracted to video content. Although she likes reading, she feels more drawn to the visual storytelling on Xiaohongshu. But when it comes to more professional or technical info, she still likes to use Google.

I3 shared her thoughts on how Google's lengthy articles stack up against Xiaohongshu's brief and to-the-point content, highlighting that the latter is more time-efficient and direct. She pointed out that Xiaohongshu frequently uses video format to share information, which she thinks is more convincing and interesting. She really likes using Xiaohongshu for her searches because it offers clear information and helpful visuals.

I4 mentioned that she prefers to avoid text-heavy formats, such as those found on Google. She likes images and videos since they are more interesting and look better. She finds Xiaohongshu's format not just convenient, but also more appealing than the long paragraphs usually seen on Google.

I5 pointed out that the real power of Xiaohongshu comes from the genuine experiences of its users and the way it tells stories through visuals. She really believes in the realness of everyday users sharing their stories, which she thinks is more relatable and genuine than the more academic and dense articles you find on Google. She really likes how Xiaohongshu lets her check out real photos and videos, which helps her get a better sense of whether a product or place is worth looking into.

In general, people really like Xiaohongshu because it's visually engaging, offers real user experiences, provides concise information, and is easy to access. On the other hand, Google is mostly used for more professional or technical research.

Q7: Are there specific features of Xiaohongshu that make it easier or more appealing for your information search? If so, which ones and why?

In talking about what makes Xiaohongshu better for finding information, people pointed out several features that improve how easy it is to use and how visually interesting it is.

I1 noted that the way posts are designed on Xiaohongshu, especially the captions and cover photo arrangements, really stands out and captures attention well. She said that the way captions go with cover photos helps her figure out which posts to check out. Xiaohongshu's format is different from Facebook because it combines text and images more seamlessly. This makes it easier for her to find the content she needs and move around the platform effectively.

I2 highlighted the importance of the visual search experience on Xiaohongshu. When looking for something like food, she can quickly see pictures of different dishes or locations without having to click into separate articles, which is usually how it works with Google. This image-first

approach helps her quickly see what people like and narrow down choices, making things easier and speeding up her decisions. She mentioned that having so much video content helps her get a feel for the atmosphere and quality of places right away, which she thinks is more engaging than just reading text.

I3 pointed out the recommendation algorithm used by Xiaohongshu. She realised that after watching specific types of content, such as beauty videos, the platform automatically suggests more of that category in her feed. This ongoing flow of tailored content keeps her interested and helps her find related information effortlessly. She pointed out that the categorical browsing on Xiaohongshu is organised well, with sections for nails, food, travel, and other topics, making it easier for her to search when she's looking for something specific.

I4 pointed out that Xiaohongshu's mix of images and videos makes it easier and more engaging to understand information than Google's text-heavy approach. She thinks it's really cooled that people on Xiaohongshu share their experiences using different media formats. It helps to visualise and connect with the content better. Also, she appreciates that interacting with content creators feels more seamless, making it easier for users to ask questions and receive quick answers.

I5 pointed out the cool photo-based search feature of Xiaohongshu. She mentioned that when she spots a product, like a perfume or a piece of clothing, but isn't clear on its brand or specifics, she can just snap a photo, and Xiaohongshu's search engine will automatically recognise the item, connecting her to posts and reviews. She thinks this feature is helpful and works well, particularly when she doesn't have much information about the product.

In all, the interviewees thought that Xiaohongshu's focus on visuals, its ability to interact in real-time, personalised content suggestions, organised categories, and photo-based search features are what really make it different from traditional platforms like Google, making it more engaging and easier to use.

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Q1: How does the information you find on Xiaohongshu influence your decision-making process?

In talking about how Xiaohongshu affects their decision-making, interviewees mentioned that various features like user-generated content, comments, and influencer recommendations play a crucial role in their buying decisions.

I1 said that the most important thing for her is the real user reviews. She pointed out that the users on Xiaohongshu are open about sharing their experiences, whether they're good or bad, which helps her make better decisions. She really appreciates honest feedback because it plays a key role in her decision to purchase a product.

I2 emphasised how crucial comments are in her decision-making process. She mentioned that when she checks out reviews on Xiaohongshu, she really values the comment section. Comments help her assess how trustworthy and relevant the content is, particularly regarding food. She mentioned that when she follows influencers, she usually doesn’t check the comments because the way the influencer presents themselves is enough for her to trust them. The style of the content creator and how it matches her own preferences really influence her choice to follow or buy.

I3 emphasised how important comments are in her decision-making process. She noticed that Xiaohongshu's platform offers more opportunities for interaction and feedback than Google, which tends to have less user engagement. The mix of user comments, likes, and shares really boosts the content's credibility since it shows actual experiences from actual people. This interaction really affects her buying choices, particularly when the feedback from customers seems genuine and thorough.

I4 mentioned that the diverse content on Xiaohongshu, created by various users, influences her level of trust. She likes that the posts on the platform are relatable and casual, which makes the information seem more trustworthy. She prefers using Xiaohongshu over Google because it feels more relatable and provides easy, direct access to content created by users.

I5 said that product reviews from influencers really affect her choices, even if she didn't plan to buy something at first. She mentioned that occasionally; after watching a product review by an influencer, she thinks the item might be helpful and chooses to buy it. She pointed out how the subtle advertising on Xiaohongshu blends into the stories, making it seem less like a typical ad and more like a suggestion from someone she trusts, which ultimately affects her choice to purchase.

The interviewees all seemed to think that Xiaohongshu's features, like real-time user feedback, influencer reviews, interactive comment sections, and creative advertising, really impact their decision-making a lot. The platform's design really helps create a community vibe, which makes it easier for users to feel good about their buying decisions by seeing what others have experienced.

Q2: Can you share an example how something you searched on Xiaohongshu affected a decision you made?

Interviewees emphasised the platform's impact on their decisions regarding travel, food, product purchases, health information, and even housing when they discussed instances where Xiaohongshu affected their choices.

In her travel planning, **I1** frequently consults Xiaohongshu for suggestions on where to stay. She gives preference to hotels that have received positive reviews from numerous influencers. Hotels that get multiple recommendations from influential people are more likely to be well-liked and provide a better experience, in her experience. She verifies the details on booking platforms like Agoda or Booking.com after getting information from Xiaohongshu, before completing her reservation. According to her, this strategy has been effective in guiding her away from bad decisions made while travelling.

When asked for an example pertaining to food hunting, **I2** gave one. She elaborated that enticing restaurant and food-related photos on Xiaohongshu would initially pique her interest. She scans the thumbnails and reads the captions and descriptions as soon as an image grabs her attention. To find genuine user feedback if the post itself lacks sufficient information, she examines the

comments. She finds that visuals, followed by descriptions, and finally comments, solidify her decision to visit a place. She can check if the place is worth visiting using this methodical process.

After finding what she needed on Xiaohongshu, **I3** recounted her experience buying pimple patch. She came across a listing for several products, each with comments from previous buyers. She went on to say that she could tell which posts were shared by influencers, but that she always checked the comments for real user reviews to be sure. She found a product with fair pricing and positive reviews after comparing several options based on honest reviews. Knowing that her decision had been supported by others' experiences gave her confidence in it.

I4 offered an illustration that was more pertinent to health. Instead of seeing a doctor, she says she prefers to look up health-related topics on Xiaohongshu. For example, she sought out information on potential causes and treatments for breakouts on her forehead on the platform. Because she could get answers fast and evaluate them out based on other people's experiences, she thought it was far more convenient than going to the doctor. Her confidence in the health advice provided by the Xiaohongshu community is evident here.

Through Xiaohongshu, **I5** had a one-of-a-kind experience finding a rental home in Malaysia. She opted to use the platform to search for housing near her university (UTAR) since she was new to the nation and didn't know anyone who could help her with real estate. While searching for a flatmate, she came across an ad from another student. She exchanged university credentials and identification cards as part of extensive conversations to confirm the person's identity, despite her initial fears of frauds. After some time, she was able to secure the rental and make it her first home in Malaysia. Even for big decisions like housing, Xiaohongshu can be a helpful platform, as this example shows.

In general, the interviewees showcased how Xiaohongshu's visual content, authentic user reviews, and interactive community feedback greatly impact decision-making in a wide range of domains, including travel, food, health, and housing.

Q3: Do you feel that using Xiaohongshu affects your opinions or behaviours? In what ways?

Interviewees' insights into various areas of their lives, such as purchasing decisions, mental health practices, lifestyle changes, and personal growth, were shared when discussing the ways in which Xiaohongshu influences their opinions and behaviours.

Xiaohongshu has a significant impact on **I1** 's purchasing decisions, as she mentioned. Thanks to the platform, she learns about a plethora of products that would have slipped her radar otherwise. While Xiaohongshu does influence her purchasing decisions, she stressed that it does not have much of an impact on her fundamental principles or beliefs. She claimed that the platform's larger ideological influences were less likely to sway her because she had strong personal beliefs.

In particular, the meditation and mindfulness-related material in Xiaohongshu has had a profound effect on **I2** 's mental health practices. She regularly employs the strategies advocated by a Chinese content creator for mental wellness. Sin Ran said that Xiaohongshu is like a digital book, but with shorter, easier-to-digest chapters, so she can read more in-depth, reflective material. She likened her time on the platform to perusing thought-provoking books, only with more visuals and interactivity. She said that her outlook has been more open, and her mental health has improved because of this continuous exposure.

The evolution of **I3 ‘**s faith in Xiaohongshu influencers was something she contemplated. At first, she would put her faith in recommendations from influencers. However, after being let down by products that fell short of expectations, she started to trust reviews written by actual users. Xiaohongshu has had a positive impact on her personal growth, even though she is suspicious of influencers. She has taken a more resilient attitude after frequently encountering uplifting material, especially that which promotes women's independence and empowerment. Without having to read extensive books, she was able to learn latest ideas and find encouragement at Xiaohongshu.

Xiaohongshu has affected **I4** 's purchasing habits, she said, citing her increasing fascination with mechanical keyboards as an example. She was uninterested in these products before using

Xiaohongshu, but she became fascinated after reading reviews and posts about various models and ended up buying one. According to her, what piqued her interest and ultimately led to her making a purchase was the platform's abundance of aesthetically pleasing images and in-depth reviews.

I5 gave an example of how Xiaohongshu has affected her way of life, particularly her exercise and nutrition habits. For example, she frequently sees recommendations to eat cucumbers for better health or lemons for fairer skin. She is now making these changes to her routine because of these suggestions. More than that, she gets her exercise fix from fitness influencers whose programs she follows. The fact that I5 saves posts she finds interesting first and then follows the advice when she feels motivated shows how Xiaohongshu has a subtle but major influence on her daily behaviour.

In general, the interviewees demonstrated that Xiaohongshu influences not just their purchasing habits but also their lifestyle choices, personal development, and mental health practices. Users find it easy to absorb added information and incorporate it into their daily lives due to the platform's visual and interactive nature.

Q4: Does Xiaohongshu help you solve problems or answer your questions? Why or why not?

Most interviewees thought that Xiaohongshu does an excellent job of helping with problems and answering questions, especially with insights from the community, product suggestions, and fast tutorials.

I1 mentioned that Xiaohongshu assists her with issues primarily concerning shopping and making accommodation reservations. She talked about how she once turned to Xiaohongshu for advice on career planning when she was thinking about studying early childhood education. After she posted a question on the platform, she got a lot of replies, including some warnings about the difficulties in the field, which made her think twice about that career path. She pointed out that the feedback from the Xiaohongshu community can really help in avoiding mistakes.

I2 thinks Xiaohongshu is helpful for learning about leadership and self-improvement. She talked

about how she recently looked up advice on being an effective leader and managing difficulties in leadership positions. Even though she recognised that Xiaohongshu might not have a lot of technical or professional knowledge, she appreciated its content for the mental support and guidance it offered, almost like mentorship. She thinks that even though it might not be as challenging academically, it provides relatable subjective experiences that are useful for personal growth.

I3 mentioned that Xiaohongshu was important for her in learning makeup techniques. With no previous experience, she turned to the platform to watch video tutorials that broke everything down into simple steps, making it easy for her to understand. She mentioned that the short-video format of Xiaohongshu is more efficient and accessible than YouTube, which usually has longer tutorials. The clear and detailed instructions on Xiaohongshu helped her learn skills more quickly, making it her favourite platform for picking up beauty techniques.

I4 pointed out that Xiaohongshu is useful for addressing daily issues, such as locating skincare products for acne. She often looks up product suggestions and user feedback to help her make purchasing decisions. She really likes how interactive the platform is, where she can leave comments and get direct replies from other users. This helps with solving problems in real-time and engaging with the community.

I5 mentioned that Xiaohongshu is useful for discovering entertainment resources, like free streaming sites for dramas or free eBooks. She frequently looks for terms such as "free resources" and can find a range of links shared by others, helping her discover no-cost entertainment options.

In general, people thought that Xiaohongshu is helpful for solving problems and finding answers. This is mainly because of its user-generated content, engaging community, and the short videos that are easy to understand. The platform offers real-world experiences and suggestions from peers, making it a useful tool for daily needs and lifestyle advice.

Q5: How do interactions with other users or influencers on Xiaohongshu shape your choices or behaviour?

The interviewees shared a variety of experiences with their interactions on Xiaohongshu. Some were actively involved in decision-making, while others chose to remain more passive. The impact of these interactions appeared to change based on the type of content and personal preferences.

I1 said that she does not often connect with Xiaohongshu influencers regarding her personal beliefs or values, but she does talk to other users when it comes to making logical choices, such as selecting a university course. She talked about how her conversations with users on Xiaohongshu made her think that early childhood education might not be the best fit for her, since a lot of users shared their thoughts on its difficulties. Even though she usually holds strong personal beliefs, she finds Xiaohongshu helpful for making practical decisions.

I2 adopts a passive stance on Xiaohongshu, stating that she does not comment or engage with others and maintains her account's anonymity. Xiaohongshu feels more like a personal space for her to browse instead of actively engaging. She mentioned that she does not follow anyone she knows or share any content, so her experience is completely observational instead of interactive.

I3 mentioned that those interactions, particularly with user comments and influencers, have a significant impact on her buying choices. She relies heavily on user reviews to get genuine feedback about products, frequently looking at comments to grasp actual experiences. She pays attention to what influencers recommend, but she knows there might be biases because of sponsorships. When planning trips, she usually checks out influencers for advice and destination suggestions, especially for locations she does not know much about. This shows that her engagement goes beyond simple product recommendations and into lifestyle choices too.

I4 mentioned that endorsements from popular influencers or celebrities really influence her buying choices. If a celebrity she trusts talks about a product that seems useful for her, she will probably go ahead and buy it. If she sees a well-known person promoting a skincare product for acne, she is more likely to give it a shot, showing that she trusts endorsements from reputable figures more.

I5 talked about how engaging the experience is on Xiaohongshu, particularly during live streams

led by influencers. She occasionally asks questions during these live streams, particularly when it comes to emotional support or informational influencers. She thinks these real-time interactions are useful for clearing up personal doubts or picking up latest information. She also said that Xiaohongshu can sometimes change how she thinks or acts, especially when she sees influencers talk about emotional or lifestyle tips. She acknowledged that the guidance from some influencers on managing relationships has affected how she acts during conflicts, highlighting a significant level of influence from these interactions.

The extent to which interactions on Xiaohongshu affect users is quite different: some users are significantly influenced by community feedback and advice from influencers, while others mostly just observe. However, practical decision-making, product recommendations, and relationship advice are areas where interactions appear to have considerable influence.

Q6: What benefits have you experienced from using Xiaohongshu as your primary source of information?

Interviewees often pointed out how efficient, convenient, and easy to use Xiaohongshu is, especially when compared to traditional search engines like Google.

I1 highlighted how the platform can cut down on planning time and effort, particularly when it comes to travel. She mentioned that rather than having to plan routes and look up destinations on Google, she can simply find well-organised travel itineraries that other users have shared on Xiaohongshu. The travel plans created by users are usually well-organised and thorough, making it easy for her to follow them without needing to do additional research, which helps save time and mental energy.

I2 pointed out how fast and convenient the platform is, particularly when it comes to quickly finding information. She found it helpful how Xiaohongshu makes searching easier, especially when it comes to finding food recommendations and getting quick answers to her personal questions. She thinks that being able to find useful information quickly is important.

I3 shared similar thoughts, calling Xiaohongshu "fast and efficient." She mentioned that looking for information on Google can sometimes take about 10 to 15 minutes of going through search results, while Xiaohongshu provides targeted content almost right away. Her ability to quickly find the information she needs makes it her go-to option for fast searches.

I4 thinks Xiaohongshu is easier to use than Google and way more fun to interact with. She pointed out that Xiaohongshu allows users to connect with real people for direct advice, in contrast to Google, which can seem more robotic. For instance, when looking for solutions for acne, she can pose questions and get answers from individuals who have genuine experiences. This interactive approach not only helps her discover practical solutions but also makes her feel more satisfied with the outcomes.

I5 mentioned that Xiaohongshu is useful for finding lifestyle content such as fitness tips, healthy recipes, and language learning resources. She mentioned that the keyword search on Xiaohongshu brings up thousands of relevant results right away, which she thinks is quicker and more effective than Google. She really likes how simple it is to find step-by-step guides and helpful tips, which saves her a lot of time when she is looking for information.

The interviewees thought that Xiaohongshu was efficient, interactive, and way more relatable compared to traditional search engines. It gives fast access to information and presents it in a clear, easy-to-understand way, often including firsthand experiences that make it feel more dependable and simpler to grasp.

Q7: Have you encountered any drawbacks or challenges when relying on Xiaohongshu for information? Please explain.

Interviewees shared various difficulties they faced while using Xiaohongshu for information, including a lack of content on specific topics, concerns about authenticity, and differing viewpoints.

I1 pointed out that Xiaohongshu can be missing information on niche or less popular topics at

times. She talked about looking for gossip regarding a certain influencer's rumoured breakup but only came across a few discussions. This made it hard for her to grasp the situation completely, pointing out the platform's occasional shortcomings in content depth in some areas.

I2 mentioned that she has not faced any issues while using Xiaohongshu, suggesting that her usual searches go smoothly.

I3 noted that Xiaohongshu might not always provide enough detailed information, particularly when it comes to planning trips. For instance, when she looked up bus routes in Korea, she noticed that the information was either absent or not detailed enough. She said that even though Xiaohongshu is her go-to for information, she still must use Google when Xiaohongshu does not have enough, since Google usually provides more detailed answers, especially for logistical or technical questions.

I4 talked about the difficulty of dealing with inconsistent reviews and varying opinions on products. She mentioned that when she checks out skincare reviews, she frequently comes across mixed opinions; some people really love the product, while others share not-so-great experiences. This inconsistency makes it hard to tell if the product really works or not. To figure this out, she looks at what most people are saying: if a lot of users have good things to say, she feels more likely to buy it; if most feedback is bad, she thinks twice about her choice or checks other sites for opinions.

I5 expressed worries about how to tell apart real content from hidden ads. She shared her experience looking for hair loss remedies, noting that some posts felt more like ads than genuine recommendations. The links in the posts would take her straight to buy products, making her question if they were genuine. Even with these worries, she still likes using Xiaohongshu more than Google for daily lifestyle tips because she thinks it is more relatable and useful for her everyday needs.

In general, people think Xiaohongshu is great for its convenience and the content created by users, but some pointed out that it has some downsides, like not always having niche information, issues with content reliability, and sometimes lacking depth. Some users shared worries about ads that

look like genuine reviews, which made them feel the need to verify information on other sites when needed.

Q8: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience using Xiaohongshu for information or in general?

Interviewees provided more thoughts on their experiences with Xiaohongshu, pointing out both its strengths and the areas where caution and improvement are needed.

I1 shared her thoughts on Xiaohongshu, calling it a social media platform where people provide honest reviews of products and their experiences. She pointed out how crucial it is to keep a clear and logical mindset when using the platform, suggesting that users should carefully consider their choices or purchases instead of just relying on what they see on Xiaohongshu.

I2 pointed out that Xiaohongshu is good at supporting the Chinese language, which makes it super easy to use for people who speak Mandarin. However, she noted that the information, particularly in certain areas, can sometimes be a bit unprofessional. She pointed out that Xiaohongshu mainly serves as an entertainment platform, which might not consistently prioritise providing authoritative or in-depth information. She said that for more important or scholarly information, she would not trust Xiaohongshu because it doesn't meet her expectations for reliability and thoroughness like Google does.

I3 thought Xiaohongshu was great, seeing it as a useful place for sharing and getting information. She didn't really point out any major drawbacks other than what she said before.

I4 mentioned that she had nothing more to add, suggesting that her experiences with Xiaohongshu were mostly positive and went well.

I5 mentioned that she didn't have anything else to add.

Overall, the interviewees recognised that Xiaohongshu is great for lifestyle content and

convenience, but they also pointed out its shortcomings when it comes to academic or professional information. They highlighted how important it is to think critically when looking at content and making choices based on what users post on the platform.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research has effectively addressed the research questions of knowledge on how the main platform for information searching among university students is being used and how it affects decision-making. The results show that the interviewees know the goals and operations of Xiaohongshu. Not only for leisure but also for information gathering, Xiaohongshu has grown to be a daily necessary tool. Xiaohongshu provides a more user-friendly, visual, and community-based approach of information access than other classic search engines such as Google.

What university students see on Xiaohongshu greatly shapes their decision-making process. Their choices about food, cosmetics, travel, even housing or education depend on the content they consume. By means of user reviews and cross-referencing material before trusting it, the interaction with the platform has also helped the students to acquire a more critical attitude.

Building on these revelations, this study has also shown that Xiaohongshu is actively influencing how students learn, validate, and internalise knowledge rather than only a venue for social interaction or product discovery. Its capacity to combine peer-shared knowledge with visual storytelling changes it from a leisure-based tool into a regular decision-making tool. Students use the app deliberately to schedule meals, learn makeup techniques, get wellness advice, even investigate lodging or study tips; they are not just skimming for entertainment.

Most importantly, Xiaohongshu sets itself apart with its highly graphic, emotionally charged, and socially conscious content ecosystem. Xiaohongshu generates authenticity by community feedback and influencer relatability, unlike Google's dependence on algorithmic relevance and institutional authority. Young people who value trust, relatability, and lived experiences will find great appeal in this platform. Xiaohongshu lets users access knowledge in a way that seems personal, interesting, and socially approved.

Students also show a growingly sophisticated kind of digital literacy. Although they value Xiaohongshu's simplicity of use and aesthetic appeal, they are not depending just on it. They actively check sources, contrast viewpoints, evaluate comment authenticity, and balance influencer credibility to show a twin engagement that is both emotional and analytical. This reflects a significant behavioural change: students are turning from passive consumers into informed social media content navigators.

Moreover, the results imply that Xiaohongshu satisfies several layers of user gratification. From cognitive (learning new information) and affective (emotional resonance) to personal-integrative (self-identity and confidence), social-integrative (belonging and community) and escapist (relaxation and diversion) needs, the platform provides a whole digital space supporting the well-being and daily functionality of young people.

In addition, Xiaohongshu reflects a larger cultural change in the view of knowledge and confidence. Its appeal in a media environment loaded with well-chosen content is found in its seeming "realness." Nowadays, posts by regular users, casual stories, and visual evidence (pictures, mini videos) seem more reliable than official material. This decentralisation of power implies that credibility nowadays is more about relatability and involvement than about credentials by themselves.

In summary, this study emphasises how Xiaohongshu embodies a new paradigm in information behaviour among university students—one defined by visual learning, emotional connectivity, and peer-based validation. It is obvious that social media is ingrained in students since they depend on such platforms and cannot be separated from their academic and personal decision-making process. The emergence of Xiaohongshu marks a turning point in how the next generation searches knowledge, develops opinions, and uses digital agency in a linked and ever more complicated environment.

5.1 Recommendations

Xiaohongshu could enhance trust by incorporating clear expert badges, such as “Certified Dietitian” or “Licensed Counsellor,” into creator profiles and posts. A quick document check would support each badge, helping students immediately identify which advice is from actual professionals. Seeing these badges helps me quickly find trustworthy content without having to sift through comments or look for external links.

Lecturers could take inspiration from Xiaohongshu’s concise and visually appealing approach to enhance their teaching methods. Rather than showing slides packed with heavy text, like quickly browsing through Google search results, lecturers could simplify the content into brief, image-based summaries, step-by-step visuals, and inline questions to engage students. This method reflects the way learners currently interact with material on social media, enhancing lectures to be more engaging, memorable, and suited to today's shorter attention spans.

Xiaohongshu should be a practical learning space for those studying media and creative fields. By analysing the best posts, they can explore storytelling structures, design decisions, and how creators encourage discussions through comments. Assignments might include taking apart a well-known tutorial, looking at its pacing, visuals, and ways it keeps viewers engaged, and then using what they learn to create their own content. This practice enhances both creativity and critical thinking, showing how to present information in ways that really connect in today's world.

Brands and marketers should really consider shifting away from pushing sales ads on Xiaohongshu. They should incorporate products into useful tutorials, behind-the-scenes stories, or themed challenges that blend naturally into users’ feeds. Working with micro influencers and getting feedback from followers through polls or hashtag prompts changes one-way messages into two-way conversations. By concentrating on real value and open conversations, brands will engage more genuinely with Xiaohongshu’s student community and enhance their overall approach.

5.2 Limitations

Although this study provides valuable insights, it is constrained by several limitations. The employment of purposive sampling and a limited sample size of merely five participants constrains the generalisability of the results. The findings may not represent the experiences of male students or individuals from different universities or cultural backgrounds, as all interviewees are female students from UTAR.

Secondly, the study exclusively examines qualitative data obtained from interviews, which may introduce subjectivity and potential bias in interpretation. The dependence on self-reported behaviours and opinions may not consistently reflect actual usage patterns or enduring behavioural trends.

The scope is limited to lifestyle-related information-seeking behaviour and does not address academic research utilisation or broader media literacy concerns. Moreover, as Xiaohongshu's interface and algorithm may undergo modifications over time, the insights obtained may become obsolete if platform features significantly evolve.

These constraints indicate potential avenues for future investigation, encompassing more extensive demographic sampling, mixed-method methodologies, and comparative analyses across various platforms or user categories.

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APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for Final Year Project (FYP)

Title of Study:

The Impact of Xiaohongshu as the Primary Information Hub Among University Students: A Shift from Google

1. Researcher Information

- **Name: Eu Jin Hau**
- **Student ID: 2203020**
- **Programme: Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Media and Creative Studies**
- **Institution: Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR)**
- **Email: vincenteu02@1utar.my**

2. Research Objectives

- To explore Xiaohongshu as a reliable information hub among university students.
- To understand how Xiaohongshu influences students' information-seeking behaviour, particularly for daily decision-making related to food, social life, and university-related matters.

3. Research Questions

RQ1: How do university students perceive Xiaohongshu as a primary platform for information search?

RQ2: How does the use of Xiaohongshu influence your decision-making and behaviour as a student?

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which examines how individuals actively choose media platforms that satisfy specific needs such as information, convenience, trust, and social connection.

5. Interviewee Details

Interviewee Name:

Date:

Time:

Interview Mode: ☐ In-person ☐ Online (Zoom/Google Meet)

Estimated Duration: 30–45 minutes.

6. Ethical Considerations and Consent Script

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research interview. I am conducting this study as part of my Final Year Project at UTAR. The purpose of this interview is to understand your views and experiences using Xiaohongshu as an information platform.
This interview will take 30 to 45 minutes. Your responses will be kept for research purposes only. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any point without any consequences.
With your permission, I would like to audio-record this session to ensure the accuracy of the information. Do I have your consent to proceed?

Consent Checklist

☐ I agree to participate in this interview voluntarily.

☐ I agree to the audio recording of this interview.

7. Interview Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1):

1. How frequent do you use Xiaohongshu and what is the main reason for using it each time?

2. What types of information do you typically search for on Xiaohongshu?

3. How do you usually go about searching for information on Xiaohongshu?

4. What do you notice about the way information is presented on Xiaohongshu?

5. How do you decide which posts or content to trust for the information you need?

6. What factors lead you to choose Xiaohongshu over other platforms like Google when looking for information?

7. Are there specific features of Xiaohongshu that make it easier or more appealing for your information search? If so, which ones and why?

Research Question 2 (RQ2):

1. How does the information you find on Xiaohongshu influence your decision-making process?

2. Can you share an example of how something you searched on Xiaohongshu affected a decision you made?

3. Do you feel that using Xiaohongshu affects your opinions or behaviours? In what ways?

4. Does Xiaohongshu help you solve problems or answer your questions? Why or why not?

5. How do interactions with other users or influencers on Xiaohongshu shape your choices or behaviour?

6. What benefits have you experienced from using Xiaohongshu as your primary source of information?

7. Have you encountered any drawbacks or challenges when relying on Xiaohongshu for information? Please explain.

8. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience using Xiaohongshu for information or in general?

Thank you for your time and for sharing your thoughts today. Your insights are very helpful for my study. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings, please let me know. Should you have any concerns or wish to withdraw your data, feel free to contact me at vincenteu02@1utar.my.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Research Question 1 (RQ1):

1. **How frequent do you use Xiaohongshu and what is the main reason for using it each time?**

I1: OK, Xiaohongshu, I think I use it every day, and each day I spend about an hour or even more on it. So, every time I use Xiaohongshu, it is either to relax or to look up some information for myself.

I2: Actually, to me when I use Xiaohongshu, it is usually with a clear purpose. It's not like social media, where I scroll aimlessly when I'm bored or for entertainment. When I open Xiaohongshu, it's normally because I have a specific goal in mind.

Like, if I'm going out and I'm looking for food, or if I'm planning a trip, I'll go search on Xiaohongshu. Or even at night, I sometimes use it for meditation, I practice meditation myself, so I use Xiaohongshu to help with that. So yes, I only really use it when I have a goal or something I'm looking for.

I would say it helps me do things, like it helps me when I am outside, in real life. Like if I am in a new place and I need to find food, I will open Xiaohongshu and search. That is the closest thing to entertainment for me. I do end up seeing gossip sometimes, but only if it pops up on the homepage and catches my interest. But most of the time, when I open Xiaohongshu, it is with a purpose. Unless the homepage just happens to show me some gossip that looks interesting, then yes, I will click in and watch.

I3: I use Xiaohongshu every single day, usually for more than three hours, so yes, pretty frequently. The main reasons are for entertainment, or when I want to look for information or do some research, I'll go on Xiaohongshu.

Like for example, I think Xiaohongshu is more of a sharing platform. So, when I want to learn makeup tips or techniques, I'll also search for them on Xiaohongshu.

I4: I use Xiaohongshu every single day. No matter where I am, whether I am out or just chilling, if I have nothing to do, I will just open Xiaohongshu. The main reason I use it is to search for things. Like for example, I always have a hard time deciding what to eat. I never know where to go, so I will just open Xiaohongshu and start searching for good food spots or ideas. It really helps me figure things out.

I5: I use Xiaohongshu every day. When I'm bored, I'll scroll through it, and when I need to look something up, I'll check it too. Honestly, I spend most of my day on Xiaohongshu.

2. **What types of information do you typically search for on Xiaohongshu?**

I1: I usually watch recipe videos on Xiaohongshu, or sometimes those ASMR eating shows. I also check out shopping-related content, like recommendations or stuff people are buying.

I2: Like when I am traveling, I will use it to look for places to go, check hotel reviews, or find food spots. And like I mentioned earlier, I do meditation at night, so I follow a few specific creators for that, my go-to ones. Then there's photography too, if I want to learn shooting techniques, I'll look them up on Xiaohongshu. And for a while, I even used Xiaohongshu to study English. Yes, that's pretty much how I use it for now.

I3: Just like I mentioned earlier, whenever I have a question or need something, I will go search for it. Some of them are educational, like tutorials, and sometimes it is makeup tips too. And when I need inspiration, like for poster designs or when I am stuck creatively, I will also go on Xiaohongshu to look for ideas. There is also a lot of great beauty content there too.

I4: Like restaurant recommendations, or places to have fun, those. And, for cooking low-calorie meals, whenever I am not sure what to cook, I will just check Xiaohongshu to see what is good. They even show you how to cook it step by step. It is stuff like that that I usually go there for.

I5: Most of the time, I am also watching stuff related to my favourite idols, or things in which I am interested. Like, I love drawing, so I'll usually check out art content too. And sometimes, once you watch one type of content a few times, the algorithm just keeps showing you more of that same vibe, so I just keep watching.

3. **How do you usually go about searching for information on Xiaohongshu?**

I1: Okay, so usually if I really want to find something specific, I will just type my question straight into the search bar. And of course, my question will have certain keywords in it, so those keywords help the app show me the exact kind of content I'm looking for.

I2: I just type in related keywords, but there are also some things my friends or my sister will recommend. Like, if they tell me that a certain influencer is good, I will follow them. But if I am looking for something specific, I will search by name. For knowledge-based stuff like learning English, I have certain creators I always follow, so I just watch their content. Other than that, I do not really search for random stuff. For English learning, like I said earlier, if I see something interesting on the homepage, I will click on it. If I like it, I will follow that creator. So, whenever I want to practice my English, I just stick with that influencer.

I3: I usually just type in keywords, like "how to contour your nose," or "how to do this or that", you know, just like that.

I4: I just type in things like, "What's the best fat-burning meal to eat?" and then it shows me a bunch of recommendations, like what to eat, how to make it, and all that.

I5: I usually search directly in the search bar. Most of the time, I use keywords. For example, if I'm running low on skincare products, I might search for things like "top skincare brands" or

"skincare product reviews," or even something specific like "oil control", I focus on one aspect with the keywords I use.

4. **What do you notice about the way information is presented on Xiaohongshu?**

I1: OK, I think Xiaohongshu is a platform where a lot of users can genuinely share their opinions, like sharing things they really like. So, every time people want to buy something, or they are planning to travel and are worried about wasting money or not knowing how to plan the trip, I think Xiaohongshu is a reliable platform. Of course, you still need to do your own research, because not every influencer's opinion will match your own.

I2: Actually, I think Xiaohongshu is quite useful when it comes to searching for things. One reason is that it's mostly in Chinese, which makes it easier for people like me who are more comfortable with the language. It also really targets our local context.
For example, I use it to look up meditation content, and honestly, it's rather good in that area. I've followed a few creators whose content I think is genuinely helpful, so I keep going back to them.
But when it comes to food or travel recommendations, I've found it kind of hit or miss. Like when I search for places to eat in a certain area, say Petaling Street, I notice that the posts are all kind of similar, recommending the same few places repeatedly. It's hard to find anything niche or unique. And sometimes, what's being publicised up turns out to be average in real life.

So, after getting tricked a few times, I got smarter. Now, I always read the comments before trusting any post. I think the comment section on Xiaohongshu is honest. Like, if the top few comments are all pointing out the same flaws, like overpriced, bland taste, or bad service, then I know the place probably isn't worth it, no matter how trendy the post makes it look.
Of course, not every creator's opinion will match yours, so you still need to do your own research. But I do think Xiaohongshu is a reliable platform overall, especially when you know how to filter the info properly.

I3: I think Xiaohongshu is more of a sharing-focused platform. It really emphasizes a sense of being helpful to others. Most of the content there revolves around people sharing practical

information, like teaching others how to improve their communication skills, or sharing how-tos and tutorials. It is mostly educational in nature, guiding others step by step on how to do something.

I4: I like using Xiaohongshu because of the way it presents information. It's not like Google, where when you search for something, it just gives you a bunch of plain text results. On Xiaohongshu, different people share content through videos or pictures, which feels more engaging. Like if I want to make a weight-loss meal, some creators will post videos showing step-by-step how to make it. I just prefer this kind of content over the way Google presents info.

I5: I think sometimes Xiaohongshu creates a kind of content bubble. For example, if you like tech-related stuff, your feed ends up being only tech because the more time you spend on that content, the less you see anything else. As for me, I am more into celebrity content, so now my whole feed is just filled with posts about celebrities, it is one-sided.

5. **How do you decide which posts or content to trust for the information you need?**

I1: Actually, when I look at content, I usually scroll through the comments first, whether they are positive or negative. I feel like if there are a lot of positive comments, it makes the post seem more trustworthy. But of course, I've noticed that sometimes it's just ads or fake accounts leaving comments like, "Wow, this product is amazing!"
So, when I'm suspicious, I'll click into the commenters' profiles to double-check if they're legit. I just don't want to be easily fooled. And if I'm unsure, I'll cross-check the same topic on other platforms like Instagram or Facebook. I don't rely 100% on Xiaohongshu alone.

I2: I usually go through the comments. There was a time when I was learning about makeup, and I'd search for cosmetic products on Xiaohongshu. I wanted to find which products were suitable for beginners and all that. But honestly, I realized that it wasn't always helpful, because its mostly influencers sharing their own opinions, and everyone says different things. There's no clear standard, so it becomes more about which "camp" or viewpoint you choose to believe.

For topics that require some level of expertise, I feel Xiaohongshu isn't as dependable. It's not like Google, where the sources usually have some authority or brand credibility. On Xiaohongshu, unless you happen to follow a legit professional, most of the content is just personal sharing, not from certified experts. On Google, if you search for something like "meditation," you're more likely to get results from certified meditation coaches or professional platforms. But on Xiaohongshu, it's just everyday users sharing their subjective experiences.

So, for stuff like this, it really depends on who you choose to trust. It's hard to judge. But for other topics, like food or travel, where people share their real experiences, I think it's easier to assess and trust.

I3: I always check the comments, because even though people are "sharing," a lot of it ends up being ads. So, I usually look through the comments to get a better sense of things. Sometimes I will also search directly to see if a certain place is considered a "hit or miss," especially with restaurants. Like, if someone shares about a place with good food, I will go and search to see whether the restaurant is good or if it is just hype and ends up being a letdown.

I4: I usually judge based on the number of likes and comments a post gets, and the ratio of likes to view. If the number of likes is high, I would assume that about 80% of the content is reliable. Then I will check the comments, if most of them are positive, I would feel like it is trustworthy and useful for me.

I5: I would check how many followers the account has, how many views it gets, the number of likes, and whether it has any certifications. Sometimes, there is a Xiaohongshu's certification, like for celebrities or professionals like doctors. I feel like content with certification is more trustworthy.

6. **What factors lead you to choose Xiaohongshu over other platforms like Google when looking for information?**

I1: I feel like Google and other platforms are my secondary sources. For example, when I do not trust the content on Xiaohongshu, I would go to Google or other platforms. But the thing is, Google

or other platforms are often not able to find relevant content easily. When I search, I might only find a little bit of content, and for some niche topics, I cannot find anything. On Xiaohongshu, it is easier to discover those things. Of course, it is probably because I am so used to using Xiaohongshu, so I tend to favor it a little more.

I2: Xiaohongshu is convenient, and it has images, which I think is very valuable as a reference. Xiaohongshu tends to be more conversational, so I find it more engaging. Young people nowadays don't often look at long texts. You might add text, but it could get too complicated. So, for me, Xiaohongshu is more attractive and convenient, especially since most of the content is videos. Now that I think about it, I'm someone who likes reading texts, but when I go on Xiaohongshu, I don't really read the captions. I mostly look at the text within the images. I rarely read the captions. So, what attracts me to Xiaohongshu is the videos and images, which are more engaging than platforms like Google. But if I'm looking for professional information, I'd go to other platforms, like Google, not Xiaohongshu.

I3: Before Xiaohongshu, I used Google, but the articles on Google felt too wordy to me, and they did not get straight to the point. On the other hand, Xiaohongshu's content is more concise. Compared to Google, it is shorter, which saves time. So now, when I am looking for information, I tend to lean more towards Xiaohongshu. Plus, some of the content on Xiaohongshu is in video form, and videos are more persuasive and make me want to learn more.

I4: As I mentioned earlier, when you use Google to find information, you type something, and it just gives you a whole bunch of text. I am not a fan of reading a lot of text. I prefer to see things presented with images or videos because they are more engaging and convenient.

I5: I think Xiaohongshu is more convenient, and it features real people. Ordinary folks like us share our experiences there, so you will often find people with similar situations to yours. For example, if you are looking for a restaurant, there will be others who have shared their experiences before, and you can get more honest opinions or reviews. On Google, some content is too academic, and there is a lot of text. Xiaohongshu, on the other hand, leans more toward visual and text-based content, which makes it easier to intuitively understand whether something is good or bad.

7. **Are there specific features of Xiaohongshu that make it easier or more appealing for your information search? If so, which ones and why?**

I1: Okay, because on Xiaohongshu, I feel like the posts are more aligned with their captions and cover photos. I think Xiaohongshu does a great job with font design, which makes it easy for me to get attracted and click on the post. So, whenever I am looking for something, I will go straight to check the caption on the cover photo and then click into the post. But on Facebook, it is less common to see the combination of text and photo like that.

I2: Actually, like I mentioned earlier, when I type in a keyword, it only shows me related content. For example, when I search for food, it shows me everything related to food. Since it's all in images, I can immediately search and see if I like a specific restaurant before clicking on it. Because when you search on Google, if you type "good food," it's all text first, and you must click to get more information, which is a bit of a hassle. But on Xiaohongshu, everything is in images, so you can immediately see if you're interested or not. If something looks good, you can click to learn more, and most of the content is videos, so it really helps you understand the environment right away.

I3: I do not know if you have noticed, but when I click on beauty-related videos, it seems to know that I like this type of content. So, it keeps recommending more beauty videos on my feed, and I just keep clicking, clicking, and clicking. This is attractive. Another thing is that their interface has a category system, like categories for nails, food, travel, etc. So, if I want to focus on travel, I can just click into the travel section, and most of the content there is related to travel.

I4: Okay, I think using Xiaohongshu is better because with Google, it feels like you just get a lot of texts, and you do not know which one to look at. But with Xiaohongshu, it has images, videos, and especially since different people are sharing, it feels lighter and more interactive. If you do not understand something, you can ask them, and it just feels great, it is more friendly and engaging.

I5: I think Xiaohongshu's photo search feature is convenient. For example, sometimes when I like a piece of clothing or a fragrance, but I do not know the brand or the scent, I can just take a photo on Xiaohongshu, and it automatically searches and tells me what brand the clothing or fragrance is from. It is convenient, especially when you do not have more information to distinguish what it is. By taking a photo, you can immediately see what others have shared about it.

Research Question 2 (RQ2):

1. **How does the information you find on Xiaohongshu influence your decision-making process?**

I1: I think the biggest influence of Xiaohongshu is the user reviews. They are very authentic. If something works well, users will honestly share their experience, and if it does not work, they will directly say it is bad. These real reviews are what really influence me when I decide to buy something.

I2: It affects my decision-making process, as I mentioned earlier, especially when it comes to food. I often check comments, and I think for things that are not heavily influenced by influencers but rather the public, the comments really impact my decision. As for influencers, I do not usually look at the comments. I focus on whether I like the content the influencer shares, and if I do, I will follow them. I will not bother with comments in this case because the influencers I follow are more knowledge-based, not gossip-related, so there are few irrelevant comments. So, I think for non-knowledge-based content, comments are crucial, while for knowledge-based content, it is about whether the influencer's tone and content align with my preferences. If I follow them, I will watch their content because it is something I am learning and need. I will follow and do what they suggest. However, comments do not really influence me much, especially when it comes to knowledge-based content.

I3: I think the most important thing on Xiaohongshu is the comments, likes, and saves. But for me, the most important thing is the comments. When people leave comments, they are discussing the products, and that is more interactive. Unlike Google, which just gives you an article, it does not

have that level of interaction. So, I think Xiaohongshu has more influence on my decision-making process, especially with real customer feedback. It makes me feel like this product is useful, which affects my decision.

I4: I feel like Xiaohongshu has different people sharing their experiences, and like I mentioned earlier, it is more friendly. They explain things more clearly, and you feel like the information is more down-to-earth. That is why I tend to trust them more. That is why I use Xiaohongshu more than Google when I am looking for things.

I5: Sometimes I watch product reviews from influencers. Even though I might not have initially planned to buy the product, after seeing the review, I feel like it is useful, so I end up buying it. Also, sometimes it is the creativity of the ads. On Xiaohongshu, there are these subtle ads that do not directly say it is an ad. Instead, they weave the product into a story, and I end up thinking, "This is great, I could totally use this," and then I buy it.

2. **Can you share an example of how something you searched on Xiaohongshu affected a decision you made?**

I1: For example, when I am looking for a hotel for my trip, I will check which hotels have been shared by multiple influencers. Based on my observations, most influencers tend to share well-known hotels that are less likely to disappoint. After seeing their posts, I will then go back to Agoda or Booking.com to double-check the hotel's details before making a booking. So, after trying this a few times, I have found that this method rarely leads to a bad experience.

I2: Like with food, it is the same. I will first click on it and look at the food recommendations. I will check out the places that attract me, especially the pictures. The pictures are what draw me first, and after I like the pictures, I will read the description. Some posts include both pictures and descriptions, while others might just have text, so I will read that too. Then, I will check the comments. So, the thing that attracts me first is the pictures, and after I have checked it out, the comments are the deciding factor on whether I will go or not.

I3: Once, I wanted to buy a product for pimple patch, so I went online to look for it on Xiaohongshu. It showed me a lot of products, and I checked the comments from real users, not the ones shared by influencers, because sometimes you cannot be sure if it is an advertisement. So, I looked at the comments, the real ones, to see the feedback. I would compare which product had more comments, and then I would compare them. In the end, I bought a product that was reasonably priced and had better reviews.

I4: For example, recently, I have been curious because, if I am sick or something, I might break out or have pimples, and instead of going to the doctor, I would just search for it up on Xiaohongshu. I would look up why I am getting pimples on my forehead and how to treat it, stuff like that. So, this is an example. Because of this, I prefer using Xiaohongshu more than going to a doctor. It is just more convenient. Going to the doctor is such a hassle, right? But with Xiaohongshu, I can find solutions that help me, and I just follow what they suggest. It is much easier than going out to see a doctor; I can just look it up online.

I5: Because I am from China, when I first came to Malaysia, in my first year, I needed to find a place to stay. At that time, I did not use an agent, so no one helped me find a house, and it was a completely unfamiliar place. So, I decided to try it out and searched on Xiaohongshu for rental information about UTAR. That is how I found my first place. It was also a student from UTAR looking for a roommate. I was really worried it might be fraud, so I kept chatting with him to verify his identity. I showed him my ID, and he sent me some of his credentials, like his university ID card, to prove it. We took it step by step, and eventually, we signed the contract. When I arrived, I just moved in.

3. **Do you feel that using Xiaohongshu affects your opinions or behaviours? In what ways?**

I1: Yeah, I think Xiaohongshu influences me more when it comes to buying things, because honestly, it is the content on Xiaohongshu that exposes me to more products. But if you are talking about those big philosophical viewpoints, it is harder to influence me. That is because I tend to

have strong opinions on my own, so I am not easily swayed by people trying to preach or push ideas.

I2: Yes, especially in terms of mental health. Like I mentioned earlier about meditation, there is a content creator from China that I regularly follow. I often use his meditation sessions. And Xiaohongshu has quite a lot of content related to emotional well-being. Whenever I come across this type of content, I find it quite healing. It also expands my perspective. I feel like the creators I follow post content that is deep, deep enough that you could learn the same things from reading books. So, if you ask me, I will say Xiaohongshu is like reading a book for me. I focus more on spiritual or self-growth content, so to me, it is like reading, just in short form, with key points. So yes, it influences me in that area.

I3: In the past, I used to believe what influencers said. But now, I feel like too many influencers are just getting paid. After they get paid, they don't use the product or sincerely share their experience. They just become tools for making money, just sharing for the sake of it, but they don’t genuinely use the product or talk about whether it’s good or not. I’ve bought things before based on their recommendations and got burned, so now I trust the real user reviews in the comments more.

Because I’m not really someone who likes reading books. And if you don’t read books, you don’t really get exposed to deeper knowledge. But Xiaohongshu has this notable feature where it shares quotes or sayings, like those inspirational or reflective quotes, and a lot of content around women’s growth and empowerment. I feel like I’ve learned a lot from Xiaohongshu, especially through videos that tell women to be independent, that kind of personal growth stuff. You could call it 'chicken soup for the soul' maybe, but it’s helped me grow, at least it helped me in terms of personal development.

I4: So, for example, I will give a recent case. Lately I’ve been constantly looking at keyboards, mechanical keyboards, like for the computer. In the past, I never even had the thought that I needed something like that. But after constantly seeing posts on Xiaohongshu where they review

keyboards and all that, it really made me want to buy one. So yes, Xiaohongshu influences my spending habits in that way.
And in the end... I bought the keyboard.

I5: When I browse Xiaohongshu, I often come across things like 'eating cucumbers is healthier' or 'lemons can whiten your skin', stuff that sounds scientific. And I might follow what they say and eat those things because I want to be healthier. Or I'll look at content like 'how to make more friends' or 'what kind of personality is more likable,' and then I'll start to subtly follow those ideas. In terms of behaviour, I might watch fitness influencers. When I see how great their bodies look and what they're doing to train, I'll follow along with their workouts too. I usually save the posts first, then go back to watch them. Basically, when the mood hits, I'll go try it out or follow along.

4. **Does Xiaohongshu help you solve problems or answer your questions? Why or why not?**

I1: I think, yes, like I just mentioned, Xiaohongshu helps me solve problems like buying things or booking hotels. And sometimes when you really don't know what to do, you can make a post on Xiaohongshu and ask, and then you'll get some answers.

Like when I didn't know what course I should take. I was thinking about going into education, like early childhood education. So, I posted on Xiaohongshu asking if I was suitable for the education field, or what the prospects are like in early childhood education.
In the end, I got a lot of replies from users, and many of them gave negative comments, which helped me avoid making the wrong choice. So, I combined their opinions and decided not to consider early childhood education anymore.

I2: Yes, as I mentioned earlier, I like eating those things and all that. Okay, I can share something recent too. Lately, I've been having some issues with leadership. Just a few days ago, I really went to search, like how to be a leader, and I'd ride my bike while thinking about how it's normal for

leaders to face certain things. I would search for those answers, and I did find quite a lot of helpful responses.
So, I think in this aspect, Xiaohongshu is quite helpful. I feel like its usefulness in terms of deep, professional knowledge is limited, because like I said, it's mostly personal sharing. So, it's not that strong in terms of professional expertise. But when it comes to emotional support or mentorship on the mental side, I think it's still quite useful.

I3: Yes, I think Xiaohongshu really helped me solve some big problems. Like I said before, I wanted to learn how to do makeup, but I was someone who had never done makeup before. I wanted to learn, so I started learning my full makeup routine on Xiaohongshu.
Some creators share how to apply makeup, and they do it in video form, step by step, like they're right in front of you teaching you how to do it. So now, I can say my makeup skills are decent, and it's all thanks to Xiaohongshu.

Even though it's not someone physically teaching me in person, the information and help it provides has genuinely helped me. OK, in the past, if Xiaohongshu did not exist, I would have learned from beauty bloggers on YouTube. Back in middle school, I used to watch YouTube, but now, as you can see, short videos are on the rise. People nowadays are less likely to watch makeup tutorials that are 20 minutes or even half an hour long. Instead, they prefer shorter videos, ones that teach you something in just one minute. It is more effective, efficient, and quick, so it is easier to absorb and learn how to do things like shaping your eyebrows in a fast, clear way.

I4: Oh, for example, if I have acne, I will go to Xiaohongshu to ask or search for recommendations. I would search for products that help with acne, and they usually have reviews and recommendations. These reviews help me solve my problem.
If there's anything I don't understand, I can comment and ask for advice. People on Xiaohongshu are real, so you can interact with them, and they can help you solve your issues.

I5: Yes, for sure! Sometimes, I like to watch dramas, so I search on Xiaohongshu for what dramas are available or any free resources. Or, if I am looking for a specific book, I search for it on

Xiaohongshu with keywords like "free book resources." There are a lot of free resources available to download, and they help answer my needs.

5. **How do interactions with other users or influencers on Xiaohongshu shape your choices or behaviour?**

I1: OK, those opinions related to values and perspectives do not really influence me. On the other hand, for more rational decisions, like choosing a university, I would interact with Xiaohongshu users or bloggers to discuss and exchange ideas. That is how I realized that early childhood education is not a good path. So, it affects my choices, but when it comes to emotional or personal opinions, I rely more on my own judgment and would not easily trust others.

I2: I have never commented on anything on Xiaohongshu, nor have I interacted with anyone. I have zero followers on Xiaohongshu, and I do not follow or try to connect with people. So, I just view it. For me, Xiaohongshu is supposed to be anonymous, and I do not want the people around me to know about it. It is my personal space. Unlike social media where I need to engage, I have not posted anything on Xiaohongshu either. So, I have not had any interactions with anyone.

I3: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, I always check the comments. I also pay attention to the recommendations from influencers, but I still need to be selective. The main purpose of influencers is to promote products, sharing information like the features and benefits of the product. However, because it’s advertising, they can’t exactly say, “This product is bad for this or that reason.” The real feedback comes from other users in the comments. They’ll share their honest experiences, like “This product didn’t work for me” or “It’s great for sensitive skin.” So, these comments affect my buying decisions and behaviour.

It depends though because I believe in thinking for myself. Sometimes what they say is not immensely helpful, and if their views do not align with mine, I will not continue listening. But if I agree with their perspective, I will keep paying attention. And, when it comes to travel tips, I do listen to influencers who share their experiences. For example, travel bloggers from China often

share information about destinations and things to watch out for, and I find that useful, especially since I have never been to those places. So, I take their advice into consideration.

I4: I think it would, because if the person is famous, like a celebrity, and they post those shot reels or ads promoting a product, I might believe that the product is good. That can influence my decision to choose it. I just look at it and see if the product fits my needs, like if I have acne and the celebrity endorses a product for that, I would be influenced and buy it, depending on what I need.

I5: It does have an impact sometimes. For example, on Xiaohongshu, there are various live streams, like those from relationship bloggers. When they go live, I sometimes type in questions or, while they share other people's stories, I might find answers to my own questions. Sometimes, when I watch knowledge-based bloggers' live streams, I will stop and watch for a bit to absorb more information.

I think Xiaohongshu does influence my views and behaviour in certain areas. For example, if I want to relax or unwind, I might watch some entertainment gossip, which will not really make me overthink and will not affect my behavior. But if I am actively looking to make decisions or find something, I might search for it on Xiaohongshu. If I am purposely trying to learn something, it could affect my choices. For instance, some relationship bloggers might say, "If you act like this, guys won't want to talk to you," or "If you do this, guys will be more interested." I would follow that advice, and it would influence my behaviour.

6. **What benefits have you experienced from using Xiaohongshu as your primary source of information?**

I1: Like when it comes to shopping or traveling to new places, Xiaohongshu helps me avoid bad experiences or "stepping on landmines." It is also a great way to kill time when I am just chilling. For example, if I am planning a trip and I try to Google everything myself, planning each stop, figuring out the route from one place to another, it gets super tiring and troublesome. But on Xiaohongshu, when you look at bloggers who personally share their itineraries, it is like, "Wow,

this makes sense." So, I will just follow their plan because it is already arranged logically and works well. That way, I do not have to do all the homework myself.

I2: It is about food, Xiaohongshu really helps me there, and on a more emotional level. The main thing is efficiency: it is fast, saves time, and just gets straight to the point. Yes, that's it, fast and timesaving.

I3: Yes, it is all about fast and efficient. Not necessarily super accurate all the time, but it gets the job done. Unlike Google, where you might have to dig through 10 to 15 minutes of content just to find what you want, on Xiaohongshu, you just type in what you're looking for, and boom, the exact content pops up right away.
So yes, speed and convenience.

I4: I think the biggest advantage is that it is very convenient, yes, just very convenient. I think finding information on Xiaohongshu is easier than on Google. Almost every time I look something up on Xiaohongshu, I get the answer I need, so it's convenient.
The second point is that you can interact with other people. When you use Google, it feels like a robot, you don't always get the answers you want. But when you ask real people, they give you the information you want to know.

For example, I'll go on Xiaohongshu and search for stuff like how to deal with acne, and the info people give is usually effective, it has worked for me. So, it's basically okay, I'm satisfied with it.

I5: I learn more things with Xiaohongshu. For example, when I want to lose weight, there are so many fitness influencers who share healthy recipes or daily workout routines, like aerobics and stuff like that. Or sometimes when I want to learn English, Xiaohongshu has all kinds of influencers: educational ones, fitness ones, food-related ones. So, when I want to eat something or don't know how to cook a certain dish, I can also search for recipes, it's just convenient.
It's super convenient, especially when you want to look something up. You just type in the keyword, and there are tens of thousands of posts that match what you're looking for. The match is super accurate; you can literally find anything you want. Yes, it really saves time.

7. **Have you encountered any drawbacks or challenges when relying on Xiaohongshu for information? Please explain.**

I1: There are times when it is hard to find content on Xiaohongshu for some super niche topics that I personally know about. Like recently, I am not sure if you have heard, but there were rumors about influencers breaking up or something like that. I was wondering why that gossip suddenly blew up, but I could not find anything about it on Instagram. So, I went to Xiaohongshu to see if anyone was spilling tea or discussing this kind of topic. But I found that barely anyone was talking about it, only two or three people, and in the end, I could not get any juicy details. So, I think that is a bit of a downside when it comes to digging up gossip.

I2: I do not think I have ever encountered any difficulties.

I3: Oh, like my travel strategies travel guides. Sometimes when people share info, they don't go into too much detail. Like for example, I went to Korea, and I didn't know how to take the bus there. So, I went on Xiaohongshu to search, but there wasn't really any info about the bus. There was some, but it was vague, like hidden down in the comments or something.

So, I feel like Xiaohongshu sometimes lacks the more detailed or specific information. If no one has shared it, then you just can't find it. If someone has shared it, you're lucky and you'll get it, but if no one has, you just won't find it, and then you'll have to go to Google. Because Google still has a wider and deeper info base. A lot of information tends to show up on Google.
So, your opinion is: normally you still prefer to use Xiaohongshu, but if you really can't find what you need, you'll still go back to platforms like Google, right?

Yes, yes, exactly. Like when I just can't find anything on Xiaohongshu because some people just have not shared stuff like bus-related info, I will end up going to Google, looking up their official websites, or just hoping that Google has something useful. So, in the end, I will still have to rely on Google.

I4: It is like, when some people share things, their content and opinions all feel a bit different, so it makes you a little confused, like, who should you believe? Everyone is saying something different.

For example, when I go look up a review, let us say skincare products, some people will say it is good, but others will say it is bad. So that makes you start doubting, like, who do I trust? It makes you unsure whether to buy the product. That is where I face some difficulty.
What I usually do is, I will keep looking and see, like, if most people say it is good, then I will go ahead and buy it. If the majority say it is bad, then I will not buy it. Unless I really cannot find a clear answer, then I might go look on other platforms.

Ah, if I cannot find it, then I might go to other platforms to check their ratings or reviews and see what they say.

I5: Actually, there are times when it is hard to tell if something is real or fake because sometimes the ads are hard to distinguish. For example, just a few days ago, I had a serious hair loss problem, so I was looking for hair growth products or some food recipes. But some of the results are links that show food pairings, and then there is a link at the bottom that takes you to a page where they have already bundled everything together and are selling it. I am just not sure if it is effective or not, since it is not just a pure sharing post, it has an ad link. Sometimes, like with shampoo recommendations, someone might say they used it for a few days and got thicker hair, but then you see comments saying it did not work at all. That makes me question whether it is really a genuine review or just an ad.

But, if you compare it to Google, I will still prefer Xiaohongshu. Why? Google does not really cover daily life content. I mostly use Google for academic purposes, but for everyday things, things I want to know about or get suggestions on, I go to Xiaohongshu. It is more daily-life focused.

8. **Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience using Xiaohongshu for information or in general?**

I1: I think Xiaohongshu is a very genuine social media app, where you can see people validate their reviews of things. However, when looking at this content, I think it is important to stay rational. You should not let your mind go astray. Before deciding to buy something or making any other plans, you should think carefully first.

I2: I do not have anything to add for now, but I think one thing that Xiaohongshu does well is that it is very focused on Chinese, so it is very user-friendly for Chinese speakers. But in general, I think it could improve when it comes to information. Like I said earlier, I find Xiaohongshu especially useful for mental health and physical health, but when it comes to information, I do not think the level of expertise is strong enough.

Or maybe I am not sure, but since it is more of an entertainment platform, people do not necessarily go to it for purely informative content.

If it were a platform where I had to draft a paper, for example, I would not use Xiaohongshu because I do not find it dependable. It is not trustworthy because it is based on individual opinions, and there is no actual data provided. Like you mentioned, for everyday life, it is okay. For example, if someone says, “There’s an experiment that shows how to improve your sleep,” and they explain the experiment, I might accept it. But if it is something that I need to be sure about, like I am a journalist, and I write anything that could influence others, I would need to be responsible to the public. For those types of things, I would not trust Xiaohongshu.

So, if it is something that only affects me personally, I would trust it. But for things where I need to be responsible for what I say externally, I would not use Xiaohongshu. I would only rely on it for personal things that affect me. If I need information that is highly professional or if I am doing academic work, I will not use Xiaohongshu. I do not think it is credible for that purpose.
It is not that it is untrustworthy, it is just it lacks the professional backing I need. They do not provide any proof for the claims.

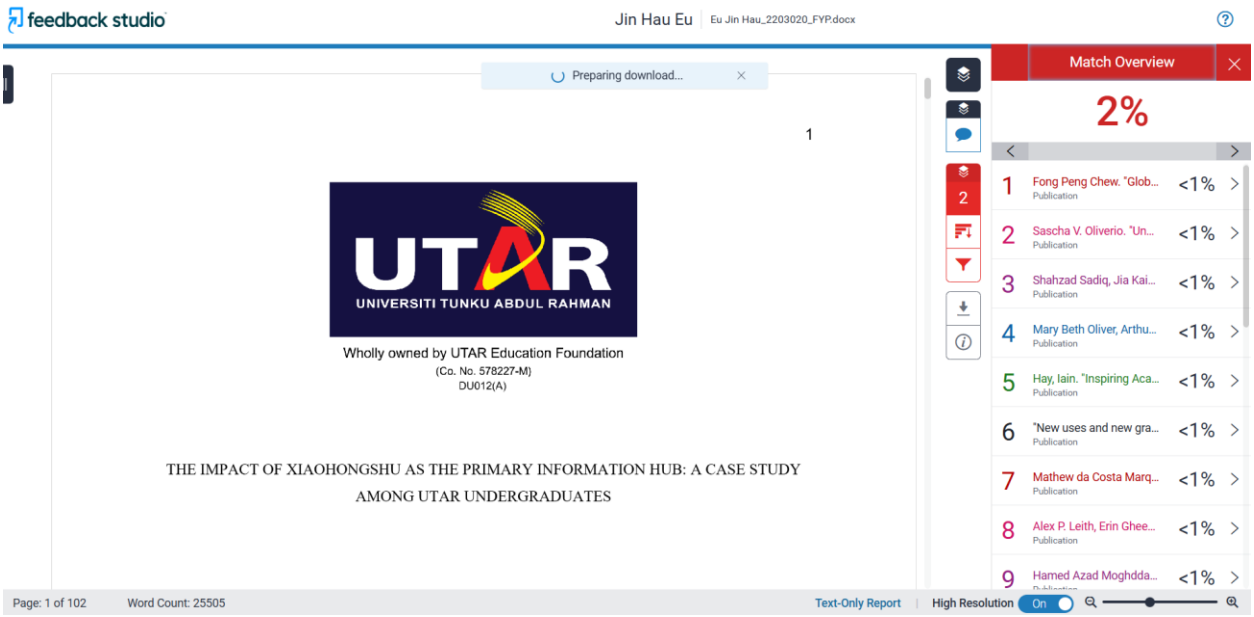
And as for having verification, even if the blogger says they are verified, it may not be true because it could be a fake account. But when you look on Google, the information that comes up is verified. Social media accounts can easily claim anything. For example, someone could say, "I'm a doctor," and share their opinions. But on Google, it is much less likely for someone to set up a website and claim something falsely.

I3: I think Xiaohongshu is a good platform. It is great for sharing information and connecting with others. It is useful in that sense, yes, not much else to add. It is pretty good overall.

I4: I think no.

I5: Nope.

APPENDIX B – TURNITIN REPORT



APPENDIX C – INFORMANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN (UTAR)

FACULTY OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

BACHELOR OF MEDIA AND CREATIVE STUDIES (HONS)

INFORMANT CONSENT FORM

Research Title:

The Impact of Xiaohongshu as the Primary Information Hub: A Case Study Among UTAR Undergraduates

Researcher:

Eu Jin Hau

Bachelor of Media and Creative Studies (Hons)

Faculty of Creative Industries, UTAR

Supervisor:

Ms. Penny Lim Wai Ping

Purpose of the Study:

This study seeks to explore how university students use Xiaohongshu (RedNote) as their primary source of information. The research aims to understand the motivations, trust mechanisms, and behavioural patterns of students when engaging with Xiaohongshu for lifestyle-related decision-making.

What Participation Involves:

- Participation will involve a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30–60 minutes.
- The interview will be audio-recorded (with your permission) to ensure accurate transcription.
- All data will be used strictly for academic purposes.

Confidentiality & Voluntary Participation:

- All responses will be kept **confidential**. Your real name or identity will not appear in the research report or any public presentation.

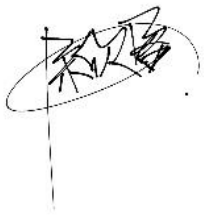
- You may use a pseudonym if preferred.
- Participation is **voluntary**, and you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason or facing any consequences.

Consent Statement:

I have read and understood the information above. I agree to participate in the research study voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw at any point without penalty and that my identity will be protected throughout the study.

Interviewee's Name (I1)

Signature



Date

12/4/2025

| Researcher's Name | Eu Jin Hau |

| Signature | |

| Date | 12/4/2025 |

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Interviewee's Name (I2)

Signature

Date

14/4/2025

| Researcher's Name | Eu Jin Hau |

| Signature | |

| Date | 14/4/2025 |

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Interviewee's Name (I3)

Signature

Date

14/4/2025

| Researcher's Name | Eu Jin Hau |

| Signature | |

| Date | 14/4/2025 |

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Interviewee's Name (I4)

Signature

Date

14/4/2025

| Researcher's Name | Eu Jin Hau |

| Signature | |

| Date | 14/4/2025 |

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Interviewee's Name (I5)

Signature

Date

14/4/2025

| Researcher's Name | Eu Jin Hau |

| Signature | |

| Date | 14/4/2025 |