



Adobe stock image | FinTok, the financial side TikTok, where creators share short videos about topics such as investing, saving, budgeting and building wealth. Financial professionals warn that popularity and follower counts do not necessarily mean the information is reliable

What FinTok gets wrong about investing, according to Central Valley advisers

Dylan Gonzales - STAFF WRITER

For young adults trying to make sense of investing, saving and building wealth, financial advice could be just a few scrolls away on social media.

Instagram, TikTok and other social media platforms have become informal classrooms for personal finance, offering easily digestible video advice on investing, side hustles, budgeting and building wealth.

Central Valley financial professionals warn, however, that a content creator's popularity does not make their information reliable.

Education or a sales pitch?

Samuel Molina, an accredited financial counselor with the Academy of Financial Education, a Fresno nonprofit focused on financial education, said one benefit of social media is that it encourages young people to explore financial topics that often go undiscussed.

The problem, he said, is that many content creators are not licensed and may have financial motivations that viewers do not notice right away.



SAMUEL MOLINA

"There are a lot of inherent risks associated with that," Molina said, pointing out that bad information can cost viewers hundreds or even thousands of dollars. He recommends checking financial claims or consulting qualified professionals before making major

financial decisions.

The line between education and advice can be harder to draw online. Molina said consumers should look at whether creators disclose their qualifications, explain where their information comes from, and say whether they're trying to sell an investment or other financial product.

Red flags to watch for

Guaranteed returns are another red flag.

"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," Molina said, adding that investment professionals cannot guarantee that stocks or other investments will increase in value.

Molina said the appeal of quick-wealth promises is understandable, especially for younger workers earning entry-level wages.

"If somebody's telling you online that you can earn \$1,000 or \$5,000 within a week or a month, people want to take advantage of that opportunity," Molina said.

What the data shows

An August 2026 study by BrokerListing.com examined 150 TikTok videos with at least 100,000 views and finance-related hashtags. It found that 74% did not clearly mention the creator's finance qualifications, while 68% noted potential gains without mentioning losses or potential failure. Promotional content was also common: 61% mixed advice with broker mentions, product promotions, affiliate links or course sales, and 53% of that promotional content lacked a clear, prominent disclosure of the relationship.

Follower counts don't equal credibility

Tina Mistry, CEO and president of Fresno-based Portfolio Advisors, said consumers should approach financial content with some skepticism, particularly when it appears the creator is trying to sell something. Algorithms are built to target users' interests, she said, which makes it easy for consumers to encounter tailored financial content.



TINA MISTRY

"Someone is likely trying to sell you a product or service," Mistry said.

High follower counts complicate the problem further. A creator with thousands of followers can appear more credible simply because of audience size, but Mistry said popularity shouldn't be mistaken for good advice.

"Follower count is not necessarily indicative of good financial advice," she said.

Instead, she — like Molina — recommends looking at credentials, experience and testimonials from people who have actually worked with the adviser or creator. Consumers should also weigh whether a recommendation explains both the risks and the potential rewards of an investment.

Mistry said every investment carries some level of risk, and investors should understand their own risk tolerance before putting money in.

"There's no such thing as a risk-free investment," she said.

How to verify what you see

For Central Valley residents who want to verify what they find online, Mistry suggests speaking

with multiple financial advisers and asking each the same question. Independent advisers — particularly ones who work with clients in similar circumstances or life stages — can be a useful starting point, and comparing their answers can help separate genuine advice from marketing.

Molina also recommends researching financial professionals through government agencies, including the California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and the Federal Trade Commission.

Closing the literacy gap

Financial literacy education could ultimately reduce reliance on social media for that guidance, Mistry said. The BrokerListing.com report cited separate research from S&P Global finding that only about one-third of adults worldwide demonstrate basic financial literacy — a gap that helps explain why short, simple explanations of money topics spread so quickly online.

Mistry is encouraged by efforts to introduce financial literacy into K-12 education and believes personal finance courses should also be part of post-high school education. Fresno State offers an undergraduate personal finance course, though Mistry noted it's an elective rather than a requirement.

Social media can still be a useful starting point for learning, she said, but consumers shouldn't mistake a 30-second video for comprehensive financial planning. Mistry recommends doing independent research, verifying claims with qualified professionals, and taking time before making financial decisions based on something seen online.

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