



POLITICAL AWARENESS AND RESILIENCE TO MALICIOUS INFORMATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: COGNITION, ATTITUDE, DIGITAL BEHAVIOR, AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AT AN GIANG UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Social media is an important arena of political socialization for university students, but it also increases exposure to misleading, decontextualized, and emotionally manipulative information. This study examines students' political awareness and resilience to malicious information through the relationships among political cognition, political attitude, and digital political behavior. A mixed-methods design combined document analysis, a survey of 300 full-time students from eight faculties at An Giang University conducted from January to March 2026, and interviews with 12 students and four Youth Union/Student Association officers. The questionnaire comprised 19 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple linear regression in SPSS 26.0. Political cognition reached $M = 4.44$ ($SD = 0.70$), political attitude $M = 4.42$ ($SD = 0.69$), and digital political behavior $M = 4.12$ ($SD = 0.81$). Although 79.3% of respondents could recognize distorted content, only 65.0% reported responding to or flagging it. Attitude was significantly associated with behavior ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) and remained a significant predictor in the regression model ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), which explained 36.0% of behavioral variance. Cognition was not a significant direct predictor after controlling for attitude ($\beta = .12$, $p = .08$). The findings reveal an awareness–action gap and support political education that integrates critical media literacy, evidence-based discussion, and responsible digital civic practice on election quality misreads the institutional preconditions of consolidation.

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1. Introduction

Social media has become a central infrastructure through which university students encounter public issues, interpret political events, discuss collective problems, and construct civic identities. Unlike traditional mass communication, digital platforms combine publication, distribution, personalization, and amplification. Users are simultaneously audiences, commentators, curators, and secondary distributors. These affordances broaden access to political knowledge and participation, but they also increase exposure to false claims, misleading frames, decontextualized quotations, manipulated images, emotionally charged narratives, and strategically coordinated content.

The contemporary information environment is often described through the concept of information disorder. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) distinguish misinformation, which is inaccurate information circulated without a demonstrated intention to harm; disinformation, which is false or manipulated information deliberately produced or distributed to deceive; and malinformation, which uses authentic or partly authentic material in a harmful or decontextualized way. The present study uses the operational term malicious information to cover politically relevant misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation that can distort judgement, intensify hostility, undermine informed participation, or encourage irresponsible sharing. The term does not include legitimate criticism, evidence-based disagreement, satire that is clearly identifiable, or good-faith errors that are transparently corrected.

The risks of malicious information arise not merely from the existence of false content but from the interaction between platform design, affective communication, social identity, cognitive shortcuts, and users' evaluation practices. Research has shown that false information may diffuse farther and faster than verified information when it is novel or emotionally salient (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Selective exposure and algorithmically structured networks can also reinforce prior preferences and create relatively homogeneous information environments (Bakshy et al., 2015; Cinelli et al., 2021). At the same time, susceptibility is not inevitable. Accuracy prompts, media-literacy interventions, source-evaluation training, and inoculation-based approaches can improve information discernment (Guess et al., 2020; McGrew, 2020; Roozenbeek et al., 2022).

University students represent a particularly important group. They are intensive users of digital media, future professionals, and potential intermediaries between institutions and communities. However, familiarity with devices and platforms should not be equated with the capacity to evaluate evidence. Students may recognize that misinformation is a social problem while still failing to identify a sophisticated

misleading post, verify a source, report harmful material, or intervene constructively in an online discussion. Political awareness in the digital era must therefore be understood as more than factual knowledge. It includes critical recognition, calibrated trust, emotional self-regulation, verification practices, and responsible civic behavior.

An Giang University is a member University of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City and serves a socially and culturally diverse student population in Southwestern Vietnam. The region's riverine, border, agricultural, urbanizing, and increasingly digital characteristics create a relevant setting for studying political awareness in an environment where local and national issues circulate simultaneously through institutional communication and social media. A previous study involving 300 students at An Giang University reported generally positive civic responsibility but also a gap between awareness and action (Nguyen, 2025). The present study focuses directly on this gap in relation to harmful political information on social media.

Three research questions guide the analysis: (1) What are the levels of political cognition, political attitude, and digital political behavior among students at An Giang University? (2) How are these three dimensions related? and (3) To what extent do cognition and attitude explain variation in digital political behavior? The study contributes to political communication and political education research by providing evidence from a university in Vietnam's Southwestern region and by examining political awareness as an integrated cognition-attitude-behavior structure rather than a single knowledge score. It also identifies practical implications for university education, media and information literacy, student organizations, and institutional communication.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Political Awareness in Algorithmically Mediated Environments

Political awareness traditionally refers to the degree to which individuals possess and organize information about political institutions, actors, issues, policies, rights, and responsibilities. Almond and Verba's (1963) distinction among cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations remains useful because it indicates that political orientation is not exclusively a matter of knowledge. Individuals also develop feelings, commitments, expectations, and judgements that shape whether and how they participate.

In algorithmically mediated environments, the cognitive component becomes more demanding. A student must not only know the content of a policy or public event but also determine whether a post accurately represents that content. This requires attention to authorship, publication date, evidence, context, visual manipulation, and rhetorical framing. Agenda-setting and framing theories explain that communication influences both the salience of issues and the interpretive structures through which audiences understand them (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). On social media, these processes are intensified because engagement signals, personalization, and peer endorsement affect what becomes visible and credible.

Political awareness should therefore be assessed through an integrated model. In the present study, cognition refers to knowledge of political responsibility and the capacity to recognize misleading or distorted content. Attitude refers to interest, caution, evidence-based trust, rejection of incitement and distortion, and a sense of responsibility for a healthy digital environment. Digital political behavior refers to source checking, selective following, restraint in sharing, constructive dissemination, reporting or responding to harmful content, and participation in university or student-organization communication activities.

2.2. Political Socialization and the Educational Environment

Political Socialization Theory emphasizes that political knowledge, values, trust, and participation are formed through interaction with social institutions and significant others. Family, schools, peer groups, organizations, media, and historical experience all contribute to this process (Easton & Dennis, 1969). At university, formal courses, lecturers, peer discussion, Youth Union and Student Association activities, and institutional communication constitute a meso-level environment in which students encounter political concepts and norms of civic conduct.

The digital transformation of political socialization has weakened the monopoly of traditional institutions. Students receive competing interpretations from news organizations, public institutions, influencers, friends, anonymous accounts, online communities, and automated recommendation systems. This does not make university education irrelevant; rather, it changes its function. The university cannot protect students by controlling all information to which they are exposed. It can, however, cultivate concepts, verification procedures, discussion norms, and opportunities for reflective practice.

Educational effectiveness depends on pedagogy. One-directional lectures may provide declarative knowledge but may not prepare students to assess ambiguous or emotionally manipulative material. Research on civic online reasoning shows that learners benefit from explicit instruction in lateral reading, source tracing, evidence comparison, and contextual verification (McGrew, 2020). Political education in the digital era should thus connect theoretical knowledge with real or simulated information problems and should treat students as active evaluators rather than passive recipients.

2.3. Digital Literacy and Inoculation Theory

Media and information literacy is the capacity to access, analyze, evaluate, use, create, and communicate information ethically and effectively (UNESCO, 2021). In the political domain, this includes identifying the original source, comparing independent evidence, distinguishing factual reporting from opinion, recognizing emotionally loaded framing, and delaying sharing when verification is incomplete. Digital literacy is therefore not synonymous with technical fluency or the amount of time spent online.

Experimental evidence suggests that practical media-literacy instruction can improve the ability to distinguish credible from false content (Guess et al., 2020). Similarly, civic online reasoning can be developed through structured practice rather than assumed to emerge automatically from digital experience (McGrew, 2020). However, self-reported confidence may exceed actual performance, and broad media familiarity does not always predict accurate identification. This makes behavioral indicators—such as checking sources or refusing to share unverified content—important complements to attitudinal measures.

Inoculation Theory provides a mechanism for building resistance to manipulation. McGuire (1961) argued that exposure to weakened counterarguments, combined with refutational practice, can strengthen subsequent resistance to persuasion. Contemporary prebunking research applies this principle to misinformation techniques such as impersonation, false dilemmas, emotional manipulation, conspiracy framing, and polarization (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019; Roozenbeek et al., 2022). In educational settings, inoculation should not be interpreted as ideological immunization against all disagreement. Its legitimate function is to help students recognize manipulative techniques while preserving evidence-based debate and the willingness to revise beliefs.

2.4. Cognition, Attitude, and Behavior

The cognition-attitude-behavior sequence assumes that knowledge supports evaluation, attitudes provide direction and motivation, and behavior expresses these orientations in practice. Yet the sequence is not automatic. The Theory of Planned Behavior holds that action depends not only on attitude but also on perceived social norms and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). A student may recognize a misleading claim and disapprove of it but remain silent because of fear of conflict, uncertainty about reporting mechanisms, low confidence in communication skills, or doubt that individual action will matter.

Online political participation is similarly shaped by motivation and perceived efficacy. Meta-analytic research shows that social-media use is positively associated with participation, but the relationship varies across contexts and forms of engagement (Boulianne, 2015). For malicious information, passive protective behavior—such as not sharing—may be easier than active civic behavior—such as providing a correction, reporting content, or creating reliable alternatives. This distinction is central to the present analysis.

On this basis, the study tests the following hypotheses:

H1: Political cognition is positively associated with political attitude among students in the digital environment.

H2: Political cognition has a positive direct relationship with digital political behavior when political attitude is controlled.

H3: Political attitude has a positive direct relationship with digital political behavior.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Participants

The study used a mixed-methods design in which quantitative analysis was primary and qualitative interviews were used to interpret the statistical patterns. The survey was conducted from January to March 2026 with 300 full-time students from eight faculties at An Giang University. Stratified recruitment was used to ensure representation from different disciplinary groups and academic years. The retained research report contains aggregate results rather than a complete demographic frequency table; consequently, this article does not invent or infer unreported gender, year-of-study, or faculty distributions. The qualitative component consisted of in-depth interviews with 12 students and four officers from the Youth Union and Student Association. Interview prompts focused on sources of political information, verification practices, reasons for responding or remaining silent, perceived risks of online discussion, and forms of support expected from the university. Qualitative evidence was used to interpret quantitative tendencies and not as a substitute for statistical testing.

3.2. Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire contained 19 observed items measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The political-cognition scale included seven items concerning knowledge of major political issues, understanding of student responsibility, awareness of cyberspace as a political-information environment, and recognition of distorted or hostile content. The political-attitude scale contained six items concerning interest in public affairs, evidence-based trust in official information, caution toward unverified claims, rejection of incitement and distortion, willingness to express constructive views, and responsibility for a healthy online environment. The digital political-behavior scale contained six items concerning source checking, following reliable channels, limiting the sharing of sensational unverified information, disseminating constructive content, responding to or reporting harmful content, and participating in communication activities organized by the university or student organizations.

Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. The retained research report states that all three scales exceeded the conventional .70 threshold and were retained. Because only the threshold conclusion is available in the verified aggregate record, exact alpha values are not supplied in this manuscript. This decision avoids presenting unsupported numerical precision. Future archival practice should preserve the complete reliability output and de-identified item-level dataset.

3.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS 26.0. Frequencies, positive-response percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe the three dimensions. Pearson correlation coefficients assessed the bivariate relationships among cognition, attitude, and behavior. Multiple linear regression was then estimated with digital political behavior as the dependent variable and cognition and attitude as predictors. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$. Variance inflation factors were used to assess multicollinearity.

The design is cross-sectional; therefore, coefficients are interpreted as statistical associations and predictive contributions rather than definitive causal effects. Although the pattern may be compatible with an indirect pathway from cognition through attitude to behavior, the study did not estimate a bootstrapped indirect effect and does not claim formal mediation.

3.4. Research Ethics and Data Integrity

Participation was voluntary, responses were analyzed in aggregate form, and no identifying information is reported. Interview material was used only in paraphrased thematic form in the retained report. The manuscript presents only statistics documented in the authors' verified aggregate research record. No SEM coefficients, simulated values, subgroup comparisons, or unreported demographic characteristics are introduced.

The journal may request access to underlying data. Before submission, the authors should ensure that the de-identified response-level dataset, questionnaire, coding guide, and SPSS syntax or output are securely archived and can be supplied under appropriate institutional and participant-consent conditions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Overall Levels of Cognition, Attitude, and Behavior

Table 1: Overall dimensions of students' political awareness (N = 300)

Dimension	Average positive responses (%)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Rank
Political cognition	90.0	4.44	0.70	1
Political attitude	88.6	4.42	0.69	2
Digital political behavior	78.1	4.12	0.81	3

Source: Authors' survey data, 2026. Positive responses refer to agreement/strong agreement as reported in the retained aggregate output.

Table 1 reveals a clear hierarchy. Cognition and attitude were high and nearly equivalent, while behavior was lower. The mean difference between cognition and behavior was .32 points, and the average positive-response rate fell by 11.9 percentage points. Behavior

also had the largest standard deviation ($SD = .81$), indicating greater heterogeneity in what students actually did than in what they knew or endorsed.

This pattern is theoretically important. High cognitive and attitudinal means indicate that most respondents recognized political responsibility and expressed caution toward harmful information. Yet the lower behavioral score suggests that awareness does not automatically become action. The finding supports the need to distinguish declarative political awareness from operational resilience. A student may know that verification is necessary but still lack the confidence, skills, time, or perceived efficacy required to verify or intervene.

4.2. Political Cognition and Recognition of Manipulation

Table 2: Political cognition of students

No.	Survey item	Positive responses (%)	M	SD
1	Recognizes a major national political event as important	95.0	4.68	0.58
2	Understands the general national development objectives for the new period	90.7	4.46	0.71
3	Recognizes students' role in protecting the national ideological foundation	88.3	4.39	0.75
4	Understands cyberspace as an important arena of political and ideological communication	91.0	4.44	0.69
5	Can recognize some forms of distorted or hostile content on social media	79.3	4.08	0.90
6	Understands the need to disseminate constructive and reliable information	93.0	4.55	0.63
7	Recognizes personal responsibility when using social media	92.7	4.51	0.65
	Overall	90.0	4.44	0.70

Source: Authors' survey data, 2026.

Political cognition reached $M = 4.44$ ($SD = .70$). The strongest item concerned recognition of the importance of a major national political event (95.0%; $M = 4.68$), followed by the perceived need to disseminate reliable and constructive information (93.0%; $M = 4.55$). These results suggest that the formal and normative dimensions of political awareness were well established.

The lowest cognition indicator was the ability to recognize distorted or hostile content (79.3%; $M = 4.08$; $SD = .90$). Its standard deviation was also the largest within the cognition scale. The difference between broad political understanding and concrete recognition competence indicates that knowledge of norms does not guarantee the ability to analyze a sophisticated social-media post. Manipulative content may combine authentic facts, cropped images, selective statistics, false attribution, emotional language, or misleading context. Such hybrid forms are more difficult to evaluate than completely fabricated claims.

This finding is consistent with research showing that online credibility evaluation requires teachable procedures rather than general political interest alone (Guess et al., 2020; McGrew, 2020). From an inoculation perspective, students need repeated, guided exposure to weakened examples of manipulation techniques and opportunities to explain why those techniques are misleading. The educational goal is not memorization of previously corrected stories but transfer of reasoning across unfamiliar topics.

4.3. Political Attitudes toward Information and Civic Responsibility

Table 3: Political attitudes toward information on social media

No.	Survey item	Positive responses (%)	Reported n	M	SD
1	Interested in political and social information concerning the country	86.0	258	4.27	0.78
2	Trusts reliable information from the Party, State, and university	92.3	277	4.58	0.61
3	Is cautious toward information that has not been verified	88.7	266	4.41	0.70
4	Rejects distorted, inflammatory, or hostile content	94.0	282	4.63	0.57
5	Is willing to express a constructive view in defence of evidence-based values	76.7	230	4.05	0.89
6	Accepts responsibility for contributing to a healthy online environment	93.7	281	4.60	0.59
	Overall	88.6	-	4.42	0.69

Source: Authors' survey data, 2026.

Political attitude reached $M = 4.42$ ($SD = .69$). Rejection of distorted, inflammatory, or hostile content was the highest indicator (94.0%; $M = 4.63$). Responsibility for a healthy online environment (93.7%; $M = 4.60$) and trust in reliable institutional sources (92.3%; $M = 4.58$) were also high. These responses indicate a strong normative orientation toward responsible digital conduct.

However, willingness to express a constructive view publicly was lower (76.7%; $M = 4.05$; $SD = .89$). The 17.3-percentage-point difference between rejecting distorted content and being willing to speak indicates a gap between internal evaluation and public participation. Interview themes in the retained report help explain this pattern: students referred to fear of prolonged arguments, personal attacks, insufficient confidence in wording, and uncertainty about whether an individual response would be effective.

Institutional trust should be interpreted carefully. Evidence-based trust can provide credible reference points and reduce uncertainty, but political awareness is not equivalent to automatic acceptance. Resilient students should be able to distinguish credible institutional communication from incomplete or unclear communication and should be willing to seek additional evidence. Transparent correction and accessible explanation are therefore more sustainable than appeals to authority alone.

4.4. Digital Political Behavior

Table 4: Students' digital political behavior

No.	Behavioral item	Positive responses (%)	M	SD
1	Checks the source before sharing political or social information	81.0	4.18	0.79
2	Prioritizes following reliable or official information channels	85.7	4.30	0.73
3	Avoids sharing sensational information that has not been verified	90.0	4.49	0.62
4	Actively disseminates constructive information	74.3	4.01	0.87
5	Responds to or reports misleading and harmful content	65.0	3.78	0.96
6	Participates in communication activities organized by the university or student organizations	72.7	3.96	0.88
	Overall	78.1	4.12	0.81

Source: Authors' survey data, 2026.

Digital political behavior was the lowest dimension ($M = 4.12$; $SD = .81$). Preventive behavior was more common than participatory behavior. Ninety percent of respondents reported avoiding sensational unverified information, and 85.7% prioritized reliable channels. In contrast, 74.3% actively disseminated constructive information, 72.7% participated in communication activities organized by the university or student organizations, and only 65.0% responded to or reported misleading and harmful content. The 29-percentage-point difference between rejection of distorted content (94.0%) and responding to or reporting such content (65.0%) is the most direct indicator of the awareness-action gap. Students appeared more comfortable with low-risk personal restraint than with visible intervention. This distinction is important because a healthy information environment requires both non-amplification and constructive participation. Nevertheless, intervention must be taught responsibly. Directly arguing with every misleading post may amplify the original claim or expose students to harassment. Appropriate action may instead involve platform reporting, private correction, sharing a verified explanation without repeating the false claim, or consulting a lecturer or institutional communication channel.

The high dispersion of the reporting item ($SD = .96$) suggests unequal practical competence. Some students may know how and when to use platform mechanisms, while others may be uncertain about the process or consequences. Educational programs should therefore include procedural knowledge and scenario-based practice rather than only moral exhortation.

4.5. Correlations among Cognition, Attitude, and Behavior

Table 5: Pearson correlation matrix

Variable	Political cognition	Political attitude	Digital political behavior
Political cognition	1	.45**	.30*
Political attitude	.45**	1	.52**
Digital political behavior	.30*	.52**	1

Source: Authors' survey data, 2026. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Political cognition was positively related to political attitude ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), supporting H1. Cognition was also positively related to behavior, although the relationship was weaker ($r = .30$, $p < .05$). The strongest bivariate relationship was between attitude and behavior ($r = .52$, $p < .01$).

The correlation pattern supports a staged interpretation. Cognition provides an important foundation, but attitude is more proximal to action. Students who are interested, cautious, responsible, and willing to defend evidence-based values are more likely to verify, refrain from sharing, disseminate constructive content, and use reporting mechanisms. This does not prove that attitude mediates cognition and behavior, but it provides a rationale for testing such a pathway in a future study with item-level data and bootstrapped indirect effects.

4.6. Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Table 6: Multiple regression predicting digital political behavior

Predictor	Standardized beta (β)	p value	Decision
Political cognition	.12	.08	Not significant at the .05 level
Political attitude	.45	< .001	Significant positive predictor

Source: Authors' survey data, 2026. Model statistics: $F = 32.41$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .36$; VIF = 1.28-1.56.

The regression model was statistically significant overall ($F = 32.41$, $p < .001$) and explained 36.0% of the variance in digital political behavior. VIF values between 1.28 and 1.56 indicated no substantial multicollinearity problem. Political attitude remained a positive and statistically significant predictor ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. The direct contribution of political cognition was positive but not statistically significant after attitude was controlled ($\beta = .12$, $p = .08$), so H2 was not supported.

The result does not make cognition unimportant. Cognition was associated with both attitude and behavior at the bivariate level. Rather, its unique direct contribution became small when attitude was included. This suggests that knowledge may need to be internalized as concern, responsibility, and motivation before it becomes visible action. Because the study did not estimate an indirect effect, it would be methodologically incorrect to claim full mediation. The result is best treated as evidence that attitude is the more proximal predictor and as a basis for future mediation analysis.

$R^2 = .36$ also indicates that 64.0% of behavioral variance remains unexplained by cognition and attitude. Relevant omitted factors may include digital verification competence, intensity of exposure to malicious information, perceived behavioral control, peer norms, political efficacy, fear of online conflict, platform knowledge, trust calibration, and the quality of educational and policy communication. These factors should be examined in a larger follow-up model using retained response-level data, confirmatory factor analysis, and SEM or PLS-SEM.

4.7. Integrated Discussion: Education, Digital Literacy, and Media Policy

Although the available dataset does not provide separate latent measures of education, digital literacy, and media policy, the empirical pattern has direct implications for all three domains.

First, the high cognition score and lower recognition score suggest that the educational environment has been more successful in communicating political content and responsibility than in developing operational source-evaluation competence. The appropriate response is not to abandon political education but to redesign it around tasks that require students to apply concepts to actual information problems.

Second, the behavioral results demonstrate the practical relevance of digital literacy. Source checking (81.0%) and non-sharing of unverified sensational material (90.0%) were relatively strong, while active reporting (65.0%) was weaker. This indicates that digital literacy should encompass both epistemic skills—how to determine credibility—and civic-action skills—how to respond proportionately, safely, and without amplifying falsehoods. Fact-checking practice, lateral reading, reverse-image checks, source triangulation, and algorithmic awareness can serve as components of a broader political digital competence.

Third, institutional and public communication influence the environment in which individual competence operates. Students cannot verify effectively when reliable information is delayed, inaccessible, excessively technical, or inconsistent. Media policy and institutional communication should therefore prioritize timely explanation, visible correction, source transparency, and accessible reporting mechanisms. However, communication should not treat legitimate questions or evidence-based criticism as malicious information. A resilient political-information environment depends on the distinction between manipulation and disagreement.

The findings also support the logic of Inoculation Theory. The lowest cognition item concerned recognition of manipulation, and the weakest behavior concerned active response. Short, recurring prebunking exercises can address both weaknesses by exposing students to common manipulation techniques in a controlled setting and requiring them to formulate evidence-based responses. Such practice should be reinforced over time because resistance is not permanent and because techniques evolve with generative artificial intelligence and synthetic media.

Finally, the Southwestern context adds practical importance. Students may encounter political information connected to border governance, ethnic and religious diversity, agriculture, water security, climate adaptation, migration, and regional development. Training should use locally meaningful cases without reducing political knowledge to local issues alone. Contextual relevance can increase motivation, while comparison with national and international cases can prevent parochialism.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Integrate a Digital Political-information Resilience Module

An Giang University should integrate a short, assessed module on digital political-information resilience into political-theory courses, National Defense and Security Education, orientation programs, or a university-wide digital citizenship course. The module should not be limited to a list of prohibited behaviors. It should develop a repeatable verification process: define the claim, identify the original source, inspect date and context, compare independent evidence, evaluate visual material, identify emotional or rhetorical manipulation, and decide on an appropriate response.

5.2. Use Inoculation-based and Scenario-based Pedagogy

Lecturers should use weakened and ethically selected examples of common manipulation techniques, including false attribution, decontextualization, selective statistics, impersonation, fabricated expertise, false dilemmas, and emotional polarization. Students should explain how the technique works, what evidence would be required, and how to correct it without unnecessarily repeating or amplifying the misleading claim. Periodic booster activities are preferable to a single lecture.

5.3. Establish Guided Fact-checking Practice

A cross-faculty fact-checking laboratory or student verification club can link political science, information technology, education, foreign languages, and communication-related expertise. Outputs may include verification reports, short explainers, source maps, or multilingual summaries. Academic supervision is essential to ensure accuracy, privacy protection, and respect for legitimate disagreement.

5.4. Convert Youth Union and Student Association Activities into Participatory Learning

Student organizations should move beyond one-way dissemination toward peer-led workshops, case competitions, moderated forums, and student-produced communication. The empirical results show that participation in organized communication activities was lower than passive protective behavior. Giving students defined roles, templates, and feedback can increase perceived behavioral control and reduce fear of public participation.

5.5. Improve Institutional Communication and Reporting Mechanisms

The university should provide timely, concise, and evidence-linked explanations when complex issues arise. Each clarification should distinguish confirmed facts, provisional information, and unresolved questions. Reporting channels should be visible and easy to use, and students should receive guidance on when to report, when to seek clarification, and when not to engage. Transparent correction of institutional errors is also important for calibrated trust.

5.6. Evaluate Interventions through Performance and Behavioral Indicators

The effectiveness of interventions should be evaluated through pre-tests, post-tests, delayed follow-ups, and performance-based tasks rather than attendance or satisfaction alone. Relevant indicators include source-identification accuracy, quality of evidence comparison, reduction in willingness to share unverified claims, appropriate use of reporting mechanisms, and the ability to transfer skills to unfamiliar topics. A longitudinal design would provide stronger evidence of educational effects than a single cross-sectional survey.

6. Conclusion

The study shows that students at An Giang University possessed high levels of political cognition and positive political attitudes, but their digital political behavior was lower and more heterogeneous. The most important practical finding is the gap between rejecting distorted content and taking responsible action: 94.0% rejected distorted or inflammatory content, whereas 65.0% reported responding to or flagging misleading and harmful material.

Cognition, attitude, and behavior were positively related, but attitude was the strongest correlate of behavior and the only significant predictor when cognition and attitude were included simultaneously. The model explained 36.0% of behavioral variance. The results indicate that knowledge is necessary but insufficient. Political awareness becomes operational resilience when knowledge is internalized as responsibility and supported by verification competence, perceived efficacy, social norms, and safe opportunities to act.

The central implication is a shift from knowledge transmission alone toward an integrated model of political socialization, media and information literacy, inoculation-based practice, and responsible digital civic participation. Education, individual competence, and transparent communication should be treated as complementary elements of the same resilience ecosystem. Future research should preserve response-level data, validate expanded scales, and directly test the effects of exposure, educational environment, digital literacy, and media-policy conditions through longitudinal or structural-equation models.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

This manuscript is based on the verified aggregate statistical output retained in the authors' research records. Before journal submission, the authors should ensure secure archival of the de-identified response-level dataset, questionnaire, coding guide, and statistical output so that they can be supplied for editorial review under appropriate ethical and institutional conditions.

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