

IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF A DECLINE IN STUDENTS' POLITICAL FORTITUDE IN CYBERSPACE AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VALUES-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The strong development of digital technology and social networks is profoundly changing the political–spiritual life of Vietnamese students. Besides opportunities to broaden knowledge, strengthen connections and participate in public life, cyberspace also reveals manifestations of a decline in the political fortitude of a segment of students: vague ideals, indifference to political–social issues, vulnerability to harmful information, value deviation and the “virtualisation” of civic responsibility.

On the basis of inheriting studies on political consciousness, political fortitude, digital citizenship and the role of social networks for young people, the article approaches the issue from the perspective of values-oriented communication. First, it clarifies the conceptual framework of students' political fortitude in the context of digitalisation; then identifies manifestations of declining political fortitude in interactions in cyberspace; next, analyses the role and limits of values-oriented communication in strengthening students' political fortitude; and finally, suggests several orientations and solutions aimed at increasing “immunity” to the negative impacts of cyberspace, thereby contributing to building a generation of students with firm political fortitude, digital competence and civic consciousness in the context of digital transformation and international integration.

Keywords: Political Fortitude; Students; Cyberspace; Values-Oriented Communication; Digital Citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

Students are a young intellectual force, playing an important role in the cause of national construction and defence. In the new conditions, the Party and the State have repeatedly affirmed the requirement to “cultivate revolutionary ideals, ethics, lifestyle and political fortitude” for the young generation, considering this a strategic, long-term task. Firm political fortitude is the condition for students to maintain the correct orientation in the face of complex changes in domestic and international life.

Together with globalisation, the market economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, cyberspace – especially social-network platforms – has become a familiar living environment for students. Here, students receive and produce a huge amount of information every day; they form, express and negotiate their viewpoints, values and emotions. Cyberspace helps students broaden their horizons, participate in discussions on public issues and access a rich source of knowledge; but at the same time it is also a “noisy” environment, where fake news, misinformation, hate speech, extremist content and a utilitarian lifestyle spread rapidly.

Several recent surveys show that, in such an environment, the political fortitude of a segment of students shows signs of decline: vague ideals, lack of confidence in the goals and development path of the country; little interest in political–social issues; easily influenced by distorted arguments online; confused when faced with conflicting information. Notably, in many cases this decline does not appear directly in traditional “political” forums, but first manifests in the way students interact in cyberspace.

In recent years, many studies at home and abroad have addressed: (i) the dual impact of social networks on young people; (ii) political consciousness and political fortitude of students; (iii) digital citizenship and political participation in the online environment; (iv) political-theory education in higher-education institutions. However, there is still a lack of systematic studies that look directly at manifestations of the decline in students’ political fortitude in cyberspace and explain them from the perspective of values-oriented communication.

This article aims at that gap, focusing on three questions:

How should students’ political fortitude in the context of digitalisation be understood?

How are manifestations of the decline in students’ political fortitude in cyberspace being revealed?

What can values-oriented communication do – and how must it be renewed – to help remedy this situation?

In terms of methods, the article uses an interdisciplinary approach (political philosophy, communication studies, youth sociology), combining conceptual analysis, literature review and analysis–interpretation of practical phenomena.

THEORETICAL BASIS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Students’ political fortitude

In theoretical studies in Viet Nam, political fortitude is often seen as the unity of three aspects: (i) the foundation of political knowledge, including understanding of Marxism–Leninism, Ho Chi Minh’s thought, the Party’s line and viewpoints and State law; (ii) political beliefs and attitudes, expressed in steadfastness with the goal of national independence associated with socialism, trust in the Party’s leadership and the country’s development path; (iii) political agency, expressed in the ability to participate actively in political–social activities, to struggle to defend what is right and refute wrong and hostile viewpoints.

For students in the digital age, political fortitude needs to be supplemented with specific capacities: the ability to orient oneself in the sea of online information; the ability to identify and resist fake news and distorted arguments; the ability to participate in political discussion and debate in cyberspace in a calm, responsible manner and on the basis of sound values.

Cyberspace, digital citizenship and values-oriented communication

Cyberspace is not only a new communication tool, but a specific social environment with salient features: openness, high interactivity, rapid diffusion, a relative degree of anonymity, strong algorithmic control and the intertwining of reality and virtuality. For students, cyberspace is both a place of entertainment, learning and communication, and a space where personal identity is formed and tested, including political identity.

The concept of “digital citizenship” emphasises that each individual – students being an important force – is not only a user of digital technologies, but also a subject with rights and

responsibilities in cyberspace, associated with legal, ethical and community-shared value norms.

“Values-oriented communication” is understood as all communication activities carried out with the intention of forming, consolidating or adjusting the value system of recipients. At the macro level, this includes strategies, programmes and media products of the political system and of the press and mass media. At the micro level, it includes communication in schools, Youth Union and Student Association organisations, student groups, families, communities; and also the way students themselves communicate about themselves and about society.

From these theoretical bases, the article uses an analytical framework consisting of three axes: (1) the digital communication environment; (2) the state of students’ political fortitude as reflected through attitudes, cognition and behaviour online; (3) the effectiveness and limits of values-oriented communication for students in cyberspace.

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DECLINE IN STUDENTS’ POLITICAL FORTITUDE IN CYBERSPACE

Vague ideals and distortions in receiving political information

One easily recognisable manifestation is vagueness of ideals and inconsistency in receiving political information. Not a few students have a very vague grasp of basic political-science concepts; pay little attention to reading documents, resolutions and legal texts; while at the same time seeming very conversant with “hot issues” presented in the form of short news, edited clips and memes on social networks.

The situation of “emotion-driven political consumption” is quite common: students easily empathise with or become indignant at sensational or satirical clips and posts, but pay little attention to sources, context and theoretical grounds. As a result, political cognition is dominated by “discursive frames” constructed by others, leading to one-sided, extreme or **unfair assessments of political actors.**

Indifference and reduced interest in political–social activities

Another manifestation is an attitude of indifference and reduced enthusiasm for traditional political–social activities. Many students consider Youth Union and Student Association activities and political-theory study to be “dry and formalistic”, and thus devote little time and effort to these activities, while willingly spending many hours a day on social networks.

In cyberspace, students participate very quickly in current-affairs topics and “social trends”, but often stop at clicking “like”, “share” or writing brief comments, lacking long-term follow-up and linkage with concrete action in real life. This shows a gap between “symbolic participation” and “substantive participation”, reflecting a certain degree of decline in the spirit of engagement and civic responsibility.

Susceptibility to harmful information and manipulation online

Cyberspace is a place where harmful information, fake news and distorted arguments easily spread. In a context where the “information immunity” of many students is still limited, it is not uncommon for them to: share unverified information, participate in comments driven by emotion; be drawn into quarrels of a personally attacking nature; become overly suspicious of domestic political–social institutions while idealising models abroad.

Some communication campaigns with malicious intent have exploited young people’s psychology of “seeking the truth” and “hating injustice” to present one-sided, overgeneralised assessments, equating the mistakes of a minority with the nature of the entire system. When

lacking a theoretical foundation and reliable information channels, students are easily swept along by these currents, showing vacillation in political beliefs and stance.

Value deviation and fragmented identity

Cyberspace is also a place where diverse, even opposing, lifestyles and values are “performed”. Alongside positive content, many channels promote hedonism, utilitarian lifestyles, material worship and “success at all costs”, in which moral and legal norms are overlooked.

A portion of students tends to “play different roles” between real life and virtual life: in written work and official speeches, they affirm noble values; but online, they may be lenient towards violent, vulgar content, lacking respect for others, or even endorsing extreme viewpoints. The inconsistency between the “official self” and the “online self” shows that their political–moral identity has not yet been firmly shaped.

From the perspective of political fortitude, these manifestations indicate a decline in all three aspects: cognition, belief and action; and at the same time raise questions about the effectiveness and limits of current values-oriented communication activities.

ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VALUES-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION

From “transmission” to “value dialogue”

Traditional political–ideological communication tends to follow a “transmission” model: agencies and organisations send out messages; students receive them relatively passively. This approach was partly suitable in a context of scarce information and one-way communication channels. However, in the digital environment, where students have countless information sources to choose from, continuing to “speak one way”, heavy on slogans and lacking dialogue, makes it very difficult to create persuasion.

From the perspective of values-oriented communication, what is essential is not to send out as many messages as possible, but to help recipients connect personal values with shared values, to perceive the unity between individual interests and the interests of the community and nation. To do so, communication needs to be based on listening, dialogue and respect, encouraging students to express their thoughts, including doubts and questions; while providing arguments, data and real-life stories so as to “discuss values” together.

Competition in the flow of digital content

In cyberspace, political–ideological messages must compete fiercely with a multitude of other content – from entertainment, advertising and “drama” to personal viewpoints of influencers. If value-oriented content lacks appeal, does not keep pace with the language, rhythm and aesthetics of the digital age, it will easily be “submerged” in the flow of information.

Meanwhile, distorted messages often know how to make full use of social-network advantages: being short, direct, strongly emotional, using impressive images and concrete characters; easily creating a sense of “discovering hidden truths”. Without a sufficiently strong, consistent and modern value-communication strategy, it is hard to compensate for the lack of healthy information in students’ digital lives.

Gaps at the level of universities and Youth Union – Student Association organisations

Universities, together with Youth Union and Student Association organisations, are the environments where students’ political fortitude is directly formed. In recent years, many higher-education institutions have paid attention to renewing the content and forms of

political–ideological education; building specialised pages, fanpages and information channels of the university and Youth Union – Student Association. However, in not a few places, these activities still lack an overall, long-term value-communication strategy.

Media content is sometimes fragmented, leaning towards administrative announcements, with few products of theoretical depth linked to students’ real lives; there is a lack of mechanisms to encourage students to participate in co-creating content; core “student communication nuclei” with prestige on social networks have not yet been formed. As a result, the ability to “keep pace” with students’ digital lives and to orient values in a timely manner remains limited.

ORIENTATIONS AND SOLUTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING STUDENTS’ POLITICAL FORTITUDE

From the perspective of values-oriented communication, several main orientations and solutions can be put forward:

First, reposition the goals of political–ideological education towards a value-centred approach. Instead of stopping at conveying concepts, it is necessary to focus on arousing and consolidating core values: patriotism, social responsibility, honesty, compassion, respect for the law, a spirit of democracy and creativity. Political-theory courses need to link content with specific situations, especially issues being debated online, so that students have the opportunity to apply knowledge in analysing and assessing practical phenomena.

Second, modernise forms and channels of communication. It is necessary to increase the use of formats suitable to students’ reception habits: short videos, podcasts, infographics, concise but information-rich articles, stories of real people and real events. Universities and Youth Union – Student Association organisations should build a synchronous digital-communication ecosystem with high interactivity, in which students are encouraged to participate in content production, becoming subjects of communication rather than only recipients.

Third, foster digital-citizenship competence and “information immunity” for students. Along with equipping technological skills, attention should be paid to skills in assessing sources, identifying fake news, analysing arguments and behaving civilly online. This can be done through soft-skills courses, training sessions, seminars, contests and simulated information-handling situations. When possessing a firm “value filter” and appropriate digital skills, students will be more proactive and less vulnerable to manipulative information campaigns.

Fourth, strengthen coordination between families, schools, socio-political organisations and media agencies in building a consistent value environment for students. Families need to pay greater attention to their children’s digital lives, engaging in open dialogue about political–social issues instead of avoiding them. Media agencies, especially those for youth and students, need to invest more in products that ensure both theoretical depth and attractive form, contributing to orienting public opinion positively in cyberspace.

CONCLUSION

Cyberspace is becoming students’ “second school of life”, where political fortitude is tested every day. Manifestations of declining political fortitude – from vague ideals and political indifference to susceptibility to information manipulation and value deviation – are not only students’ own problem but also reflect objective limits of the digital-communication environment and subjective shortcomings in political–ideological education and values-oriented communication.

Approaching the issue from the perspective of values-oriented communication shows clearly that strengthening students' political fortitude in cyberspace cannot be expected solely from "increasing the dose of political information", but requires comprehensive renewal: from how goals are defined (placing values at the centre), to how content is designed (linking theory with digital reality), how communication channels are organised (building interactive digital ecosystems), and how digital-citizenship competence is fostered for students themselves.

Firm political fortitude in the digital era is the combination of a correct theoretical foundation, sustainable political beliefs and the ability to process information and participate in public life responsibly in both spheres: real life and digital life. Building a generation of students who possess these qualities is an important condition for successfully realising the goal of national construction and defence in the new period.

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