



DIGITAL CULTURE AND ONLINE BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: EVIDENCE FROM TRADE UNION UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

In the context of digital transformation in higher education, cyberspace has become an integral part of university life, where students learn, communicate, share information, and develop new behavioural norms. This study examines the digital culture and online behaviour of students at Trade Union University in order to explore their participation in digital environments, perceptions of digital responsibility, online communication practices, and factors influencing students' digital culture. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining a questionnaire survey of 300 students with in-depth interviews involving students, lecturers, and university administrators. The findings indicate that students frequently use social media and online platforms for learning and academic communication. Most respondents demonstrated positive awareness of information verification, respect for digital copyright, and civil online communication; however, a noticeable gap remains between awareness and actual practice, particularly in the ethical use of AI-assisted learning tools, protection of personal data, and compliance with digital academic integrity standards. The study also highlights the influence of lecturers, university management, peer groups, and the broader digital environment in shaping students' digital culture. Based on these findings, the article proposes several recommendations for promoting digital culture, strengthening digital citizenship education, and developing a safe, responsible, and humane online learning environment in higher education.

KEYWORDS: digital culture; online behaviour; digital citizenship; social media; digital academic integrity; university students; Trade Union University.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology and the digital transformation of higher education are fundamentally changing the way students learn, communicate and participate in school life. Where in the past learning activities mainly took place in a traditional classroom space, now students regularly interact through learning management systems (LMS), online learning platforms, social networks, academic forums, and artificial intelligence tools to support learning. Cyberspace is no longer a communication environment outside the school but has become an expanded school space, where many academic activities, learning cooperation and new standards of behavior of university students take place. In this context, the concept of digital culture is increasingly interested in higher education research. Digital culture not only implies the ability to use technology but also reflects a system of values, norms, attitudes and behaviors of people in the digital environment, including responsibility when sharing information, respecting digital copyright, protecting personal data, etc communicate civilly online and use technology ethically. For university students, digital culture is closely associated with digital citizenship – an important competency that helps learners participate safely, responsibly and effectively in the modern digital society. Numerous international studies show that social networks and online platforms can create significant opportunities for collaborative learning, knowledge sharing, and academic connections, but also increase risks such as the spread of misinformation, copyright infringement, cyberbullying, invasion of privacy, and impairment of academic integrity in the online environment. In particular, the emergence of generative AI tools is posing new challenges to maintaining academic standards, determining authorship, and ensuring honesty in the learning and research process of students.

In Vietnam, higher education digital transformation is being strongly promoted through national policies on the application of information technology and digital transformation in education. Universities are increasingly expanding their use of digital learning materials, online classrooms, learning management systems, and online interactive platforms. However, the majority of current research focuses on students' digital literacy or technology use, while research on digital culture and cyber behavior of university students is relatively limited. In particular, there have not been many studies examining the relationship between the use of digital technology and ethical standards, social responsibility and online communication behaviors in the Vietnamese university environment. The Trade Union University is a higher education institution with the characteristics of training human resources to serve the Trade Union organization and socio-economic development. In recent years, the University has promoted the application of digital technology in student management, teaching and support, creating a significant change in the way students learn and interact. Students not only use social networks for personal purposes but also exploit digital platforms to exchange learning materials, discuss scholars, organize collective



activities and connect with lecturers. This raises the requirement to clearly identify the level of digital culture formation, behavioral manifestations in cyberspace and problems posed to school culture management in the digital environment.

Stemming from the above issues, this article focuses on analyzing the digital culture and cyber behavior of students of the University of Trade Union in order to clarify three main contents: (1) the level of participation and use of the digital environment by students for learning and communication purposes; (2) students' awareness and practice of digital cultural norms such as information verification, respect for digital copyright, personal data protection, and responsible use of AI; and (3) factors affecting the formation of digital culture and online behavior of students in the context of digital transformation of higher education. By combining quantitative survey data with in-depth interviews, the study is expected to contribute more empirical evidence on the digital culture of Vietnamese university students, and at the same time suggest an integrated approach between traditional school culture and digital citizenship in student life management. The research results are not only meaningful for the Trade Union University but can also provide a reference basis for higher education institutions that are implementing digital transformation and building a safe, responsible and humane online learning environment in the digital age.

2. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The research was carried out in the direction of mixed-methods to analyze the digital culture and cyber behavior of students of the University of Trade Union in the context of digital transformation of higher education. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows for both quantification of students' level of digital engagement, online awareness and behavior, and clarification of the experiences, motivations, and social contexts that influence the formation of digital culture in today's university environment. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire survey of 300 students studying at the Trade Union University. The research sample is conveniently selected by faculty and academic year to ensure the participation of students in a variety of disciplines and courses. The questionnaire is designed on the Google Forms platform, including groups of questions about: (1) the level of use of social networks and online platforms for learning and communication purposes; (2) awareness of digital responsibility and digital citizenship; (3) acts of verifying information and sharing online content; (4) respect for digital copyright and academic integrity in the online environment; (5) use AI and digital tools to support learning; and (6) factors affecting students' digital culture and cyber behavior. The observed variables are primarily measured using a 5-level Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

Once collected, the data is cleaned, encrypted, and processed using SPSS software. The study used descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to assess the level of expression of digital cultural components. At the same time, correlation analysis was used to look at the relationship between several factors such as self-awareness, the role of lecturers, the influence of peer groups, and the level of use of the digital environment with students' online behavior. In addition to quantitative surveys, the study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews to add depth to the interpretation of survey results. The interview subjects included 03 students, 01 lecturer, 01 faculty manager and 01 functional department manager. The interview focused on the experience of using social media in learning, how to communicate in online learning groups, awareness of digital academic integrity, the use of AI to support learning, inappropriate behavior situations in cyberspace, and the role of schools in orienting digital culture for students. Qualitative data is processed using thematic analysis to identify prominent motifs and topics related to digital culture and online behavior of university students.

In terms of theory, the research combines digital citizenship theory, social interaction theory and social cognitive theory to build an analytical framework. According to Ribble (2015), digital citizenship includes not only the ability to use technology but also ethical, legal, and social responsibility norms in the digital environment. This approach helps research look at students' digital culture as an integrated system of digital competence, digital responsibility, and ethical online behavior.

Social interaction theory is used to analyze the process of forming norms of conduct in cyberspace through student interaction with lecturers, classmates, and online communities. In the digital environment, communication norms are created and adjusted continuously through commenting, information sharing, feedback in learning groups, and participating in online forums. This shows that behavior in cyberspace is not only personal behavior but also a product of social interaction in the digital learning community. Besides, Bandura's (1986) theory of social cognition emphasizes the role of the process of observation, simulation, and self-regulation of behavior. Students tend to learn how to use technology, how to communicate online, and how to behave online through observing lecturers, classmates, social media influencers, and norms that are prevalent in the online community. Therefore, students' online behavior is simultaneously affected by personal perception, social environment, and reinforcement mechanisms from the digital environment.

On the basis of a theoretical overview and research objectives, the paper builds an analytical framework in the direction of considering digital culture as the central transformation of university students' behavior in cyberspace in the context of digital transformation of higher education. The analytical framework consists of three main groups of components.

- 1) The digital culture platform includes: awareness of digital responsibility, understanding of digital copyright, awareness of personal data protection, attitude towards digital academic integrity, and awareness of responsible use of AI.

- 2) Behavior in cyberspace is manifested by: using social networks for learning, verifying information before sharing, communicating civilly in online learning groups, respecting the privacy of others, using digital resources in accordance with regulations and complying with academic standards in the online environment.
- 3) Influencing factors include: students' sense of self-discipline and motivation to learn, the role of lecturers in orientation and exemplary, the school's management and educational activities, the influence of peer groups, families, and the characteristics of the digital environment.

The relationship between the elements is assumed in the direction of: digital cultural platforms → norms and online behaviors → students' digital cultural outcomes, in which personal, school and digital environment factors play a role in regulating the transformation from digital responsibility awareness to responsible online behavior. This analysis framework is the basis for building survey indicators, organizing data collection and analyzing the current state of digital culture and cyber behavior of students of the University of Trade Union in the context of the current digital transformation of higher education.

Figure 1. Research analytical framework

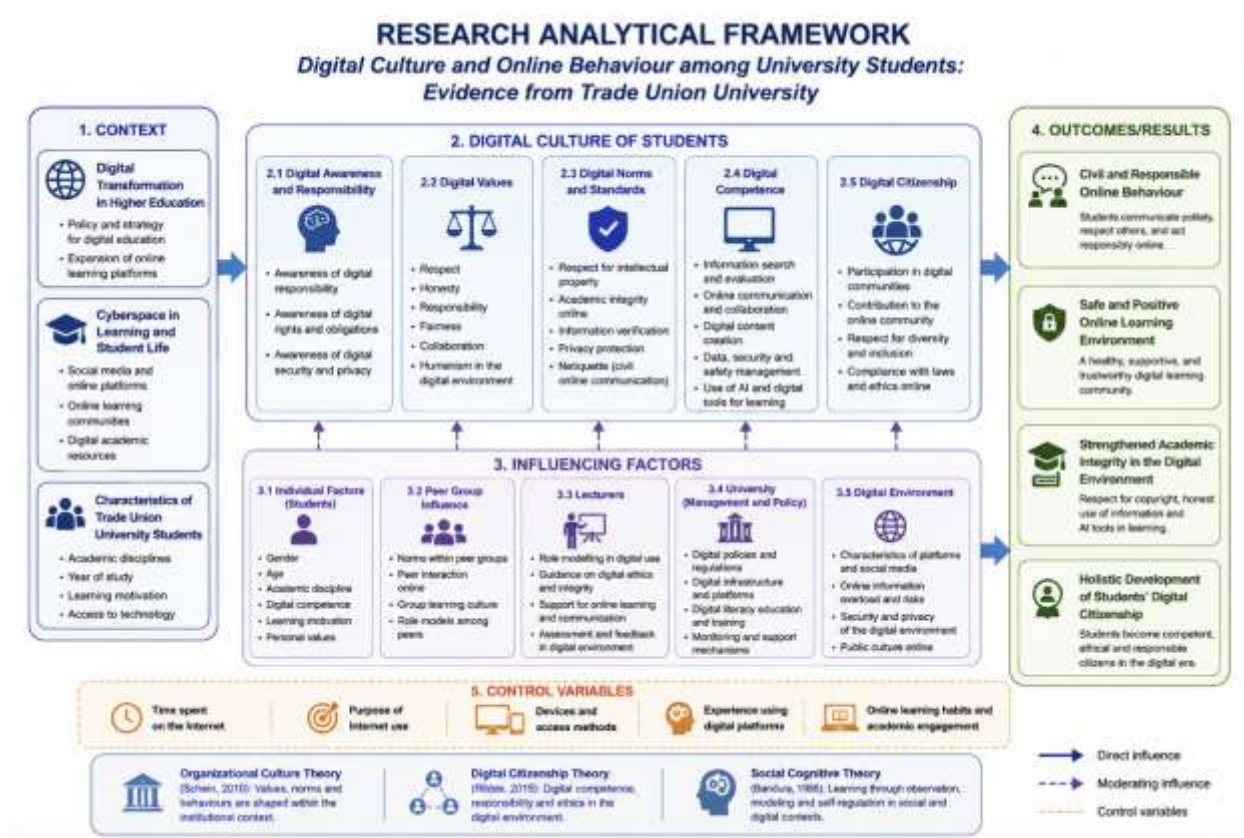


Figure 1 presents the analytical framework used to examine digital culture and online behaviour among university students in the context of higher education digital transformation. The framework assumes that the rapid expansion of digital technologies, online learning platforms, social media, and AI-supported learning tools creates a new educational environment that influences students' perceptions, values, and behavioural norms in cyberspace. The framework is organized into five interconnected components. First, the context includes digital transformation in higher education, cyberspace in learning and student life, and the specific characteristics of Trade Union University students. Second, students' digital culture is conceptualized through five dimensions: digital awareness and responsibility, digital values, digital norms and standards, digital competence, and digital citizenship. These dimensions shape students' online communication, information-sharing practices, use of digital resources, and participation in digital learning communities.

The framework further assumes that students' digital culture is influenced by several moderating factors, including individual characteristics, peer-group influence, lecturers' guidance and role modelling, university policies and support mechanisms, and the broader digital environment. In addition, control variables such as time spent on the Internet, purpose of Internet use, access devices, experience with digital platforms, and online learning habits are included to account for variations in students' online behaviour.



Finally, the interaction of these components is expected to produce four major outcomes: (1) civil and responsible online behaviour, (2) a safe and positive online learning environment, (3) strengthened academic integrity in the digital environment, and (4) the holistic development of students' digital citizenship. The framework is grounded in Organizational Culture Theory, Digital Citizenship Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory, which together provide the theoretical foundation for understanding how digital values, social interaction, and observational learning contribute to the formation of students' online behaviour in higher education.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Students' use of the digital environment

The survey results show that students of the Trade Union University have a very high level of participation in the digital environment for learning and academic communication. The majority of students use social media, learning management systems (LMS), and online platforms on a daily basis to exchange materials, discuss assignments, update learning information, and stay connected with classmates and lecturers.

Table 1. Students' use of the digital environment

Survey content	Frequency (%)	Occasional (%)	Rarely (%)
Use social media to exchange learning	88,7	8,0	3,3
Access to the school's LMS system	84,3	11,0	4,7
Join an online learning group	86,0	9,7	4,3
Search for learning materials on the Internet	93,0	5,3	1,7
Use AI tools to support learning	71,7	18,0	10,3

Source: Trade Union University Student Survey, 2026 (n = 300).

The results in Table 1 show that searching for learning materials on the Internet is the most popular activity with 93.0% of students doing it regularly and an average score of 4.68. This reflects students' increasing reliance on digital learning resources in the learning process. The activity of using social networks for learning exchange also reached a very high level (Mean = 4.51), showing that social networks are not only used for entertainment purposes but have become an important learning support tool for university students today. Notably, 71.7% of students reported regularly using AI tools to support learning, reflecting the rapid popularity of generative AI technologies in the university environment. However, the average score of 3.97 is lower than other digital learning activities, indicating that students still have certain concerns about the appropriateness and responsibility of using AI for learning.

3.2. Awareness of digital responsibility and digital culture

The study continues to survey students' perceptions of the basic norms of digital culture and digital citizenship.

Table 2. Students' perception of digital responsibility and digital culture

Survey content	Agree (%)	Confusion (%)	Disagree (%)	Average Score (Mean)
Need to verify information before sharing	81,3	12,0	6,7	4,28
Need to respect the copyright of digital documents	84,7	10,3	5,0	4,36
Need to protect personal data in the digital environment	86,0	9,0	5,0	4,42
Using AI in learning needs to comply with academic ethics	78,0	15,0	7,0	4,17
Online behavior needs to comply with the same standards as in real life	88,3	7,0	4,7	4,55

Source: Trade Union University Student Survey, 2026 (n = 300).

The results in Table 2 show that students have a fairly positive awareness of the fundamentals of digital culture. The highest consensus content was "Online behavior needs to comply with real-life standards" with 88.3% of students agreeing and an average score of 4.55. This shows that the majority of students are aware of the continuity between face-to-face and online communication norms. Awareness of personal data protection and respect for digital copyright also reached high levels (Mean: 4.42 and 4.36, respectively), reflecting students' growing interest in privacy and intellectual property in the digital environment. However, the percentage of students who are still confused about the use of AI that needs to comply with academic ethics is still at 15%, indicating that the standards related to AI in learning are not fully understood and uniform among student groups.

3.3. Behavior in cyberspace

To assess the level of transformation from cognition to behavior, the study surveyed students' online behavior expressions during learning and communication in the digital environment.



Table 3. Students' behavior in cyberspace

Online behavior	Frequency (%)	Occasional (%)	Rarely (%)	Average Score (Mean)
Communicate politely in an online study group	85,7	10,0	4,3	4,37
Ask for permission when using other people's materials	72,0	18,7	9,3	4,03
Cite sources when using online information	69,3	20,0	10,7	3,91
Verify information before sharing	74,7	16,3	9,0	4,08
Protection of personal information when participating in online activities	76,0	15,3	8,7	4,12
Use AI to complete assignments without editing	24,3	31,0	44,7	2,71

Source: Trade Union University Student Survey, 2026 (n = 300).

The results in Table 3 show that polite communication in the online learning group was the most actively performed behavior with an average score of 4.37. The majority of students said that they regularly maintain a respectful attitude in online communication with classmates and lecturers. However, behaviors related to digital academic integrity have significantly lower scores. Only 69.3% of students regularly cite sources when using online information, while about 30.7% only do so occasionally or rarely. This shows that although students are aware of the importance of copyright and academic honesty, the implementation in practice is not really uniform. Notably, 24.3% of students still reported regularly using AI to complete assignments without significant editing, reflecting the risk of relying on AI tools and the new challenges to maintaining academic integrity in the digital education environment.

3.4. Factors affecting digital culture and online behavior

The study continues to evaluate the influence of a number of factors on the formation of digital culture and students' behavior in cyberspace.

Table 4. How Factors Affect Students' Digital Culture

Influencing factors	Average Score (Mean)	Impact
Students' sense of self-awareness	4,47	Very high
The role of lecturers	4,31	High
School Regulations and Guidelines	4,24	High
Influence of peer groups	4,18	High
Social Media Environment	4,12	Quite high
Family	3,89	Fair average

Source: Trade Union University Student Survey, 2026 (n = 300).

The results in Table 4 show that students' sense of self-awareness is the most influential factor on digital culture and online behavior with an average score of 4.47. This shows that although the digital environment has many external impacts, self-regulation and personal responsibility still play a decisive role in the formation of responsible online behavior. The role of lecturers and the University's regulations are also considered to be highly influential, reflecting the importance of the formal educational environment in orienting digital cultural standards. Meanwhile, social networks and peer groups have a considerable influence, showing that students' online standards of behavior are formed not only through formal education but also through the process of social interaction in the online community.

The results show that students of the Trade Union University have adapted quite well to the digital learning environment, as shown by the high level of use of online platforms and a positive awareness of many fundamentals of digital culture. However, the study also points to a significant gap between awareness and practice, particularly in behaviors related to citing sources, respecting digital copyright, and using AI responsibly. These results show that students' digital culture is in a transitional stage from "using technology" to "using technology responsibly". This raises the need to strengthen education on digital citizenship, digital academic integrity and AI ethics, and build online behavior support and orientation mechanisms in line with the current context of higher education digital transformation.

4. DISCUSSION

The research results show that the digital culture of the students of the University of Trade Union is being formed in the transition from a traditional learning environment to a digital learning environment, in which digital technology is not only a tool to support learning but also a new social space that shapes values, standards and behaviors of students. The high use of online platforms, social networks, and AI tools shows that students have adapted quite quickly to the context of digital transformation of higher education. However, the results also reflect that technological adaptation has not yet meant the corresponding maturity in digital culture and digital responsibility. First of all, research shows that students have a relatively positive awareness of the fundamentals of digital culture, especially civilized



online communication, protection of personal data, and respect for digital copyright. This is in line with Ribble's (2015) view of digital citizenship, according to which digital citizens not only need to be able to use technology, but also understand their rights, obligations, and responsibilities in the digital environment. These results show that college students are now beginning to be aware that cyber behavior has a real impact on the academic and social community, rather than simply personal activity separate from the school environment.

However, a key finding of the study is the gap between digital culture perceptions and practices. Although the majority of students agree with the principles of academic honesty and respect for digital copyright, the rate of regularly citing online sources or fully adhering to digital academic integrity standards is significantly lower. This reflects a phenomenon that many international studies call the "value–practice gap", that is, learners can accept a value at the cognitive level but have not yet converted that value into stable behavior in practice. This gap can be explained from the perspective of Bandura's (1986) theory of social cognition. According to this theory, behavior is simultaneously influenced by personal cognition, the social environment, and the mechanisms that reinforce behavior. In the digital learning environment, students are frequently exposed to informal material sharing, using online content without adequate citations, or harnessing AI tools to assist in completing learning tasks. When these practices are perceived as pervasive and less regulated, they can undermine the transition from digital ethical awareness to digital ethical behavior.

Another highlight of the study is the popularity of AI that aids learning in college student life. The high percentage of students who regularly use AI tools shows that AI is quickly becoming an element of the modern learning environment. However, the fact that a part of students admit to using AI to complete assignments without significant correction shows that the norm for using AI in academics is still not clearly established. These results reflect a new challenge for higher education in defining the line between legitimate academic support and dependence on academic honesty. This also shows that the concept of academic integrity needs to be extended to digital academic integrity. In the traditional educational environment, the issue of academic honesty is often associated with document copying or exam cheating; in the digital environment, it also includes the use of generative AI, AI-generated content editing, transparency of the level of support of digital tools, and ensuring the originality of learning products. Therefore, the results of the study suggest that universities need to develop specific guidelines on the use of AI in learning and research, rather than just applying traditional regulations on plagiarism.

The study also shows that civilized online communication is a relatively positive behavior performed by students. This reflects the formation of digital communication norms in the online learning community. However, qualitative data shows that some students still tend to view online environments as less formal spaces than in-person classrooms, which in turn leads to the use of substandard language, slow responses, or a lack of responsibility in online group activities. This finding is consistent with Goffman's (1959) view that individual behavior changes depending on the context of social interaction; In a digital environment, the lack of a physical presence can reduce a sense of responsibility and social control over communication behavior. The results of the analysis of influencing factors show that students' sense of self-awareness is the factor with the strongest impact on digital culture and online behavior. This confirms that while technology, schools, and the social environment play an important role, self-regulation and personal responsibility remain the core foundations of digital culture. This finding has important implications for higher education, because building a digital culture cannot only rely on external control regulations, but should focus on developing the autonomy, critical thinking and ethical responsibility of learners. In addition, the role of lecturers and the university is considered to have a high influence on the formation of students' digital culture. Students tend to be influenced by how lecturers communicate online, use digital learning materials, cite sources, and behave in a digital learning environment. This is in line with the view of the role of exemplary role in education, whereby cultural norms are communicated not only through teaching content but also through the actual behavior of lecturers in the process of interacting with learners. In addition, the influence of peer groups and social networks shows that the digital culture of students is strongly formed through the process of online social interaction. Study groups on Facebook, Zalo, Telegram or other platforms are not only a place to exchange learning information but also a space where norms of conduct are reinforced, adjusted or even deviated. From the perspective of social interaction theory, digital cultural norms are created through continuous interaction between members of the online community, and so building a digital culture needs to be approached at the level of the digital learning community. not just on an individual level.

From the above results, some important implications can be drawn. First, universities need to shift from an approach to training skills using technology to digital culture and digital citizenship education, which emphasizes the ethical, legal and social responsibilities of learners in cyberspace. Second, it is necessary to integrate content on digital academic integrity, personal data protection, information verification, and responsible use of AI into the learning skills modules or student orientation at the beginning of the course. Third, the university needs to build a safe and positive online learning environment, including clear online codes of conduct, student support mechanisms, and regular communication activities on digital culture.

Overall, the study shows that the digital culture of the students of the University of Trade Union is developing in the direction of combining technological capabilities and new cultural norms of the digital society. However, the transition from "technology users" to "responsible digital citizens" is not yet complete. This raises the need to approach digital culture as a core component of university



culture in the digital age, in which the development of digital responsibility, digital academic integrity and digital citizenship should be considered an important goal of Vietnamese higher education today.

5. CONCLUSION

Research on digital culture and cyber behavior of students of the University of Trade Union shows that the digital transformation of higher education is creating significant changes in the way students learn, communicate and participate in school life. Cyberspace has become an important part of the university environment, where students not only access knowledge but also form new values, norms, and behaviors that are relevant to the digital social context. The results of the study show that students have a very high level of use of digital platforms for learning and academic communication, especially social networks, learning management systems and online learning resources. The majority of students have a positive awareness of digital responsibility, which is reflected in the high consensus with principles such as civilized online communication, protection of personal data, verification of information before sharing, and respect for the copyright of digital documents. This shows that students' awareness of digital culture has been formed at a relatively good level in the context of digital higher education. However, research also shows that the gap between perception and practice still exists quite clearly. Behaviors related to citing online resources, adhering to digital academic integrity, and using AI to support learning responsibly have not reached the level corresponding to the perception that students express. In particular, the fact that a part of students use AI to complete assignments without editing or re-evaluating content presents new challenges to maintaining academic honesty in today's digital education environment.

The study also confirms that students' digital culture is influenced by many factors, with students' sense of self-awareness being the most impactful. In addition, the role of lecturers, the university's regulations and orientation, the influence of peer groups, and the characteristics of the digital environment all have a significant impact on the formation of students' online behavior. This shows that building a digital culture cannot only rely on administrative management measures but needs to be approached as a comprehensive educational process combining individuals, schools and digital learning communities. From the research results, the article proposes some implications to strengthen digital culture in higher education. First, it is necessary to integrate digital citizenship education and digital academic integrity into training programs and student-oriented activities. Second, schools need to develop clear guidelines on the use of AI in learning and research, helping students distinguish between legitimate academic aid and violations of academic standards. Third, it is necessary to develop a safe, positive and responsible online learning environment, through online codes of conduct, communication activities on digital culture and mechanisms to support students in the process of participating in the digital environment.

While the study has provided meaningful empirical evidence on the digital culture and online behavior of college students, the study still has some limitations such as the scope of the survey being conducted at only one higher education institution and relying primarily on student self-report data. Further studies can expand the scope of the survey to many different universities, combining advanced quantitative analysis methods and comparative research across training disciplines to clarify the transformation of digital culture in Vietnam's higher education today. In conclusion, the study confirms that building a digital culture and behaving responsibly in cyberspace should be considered a strategic task of higher education in the digital age. The goal of this process is not only to help students become proficient in the use of technology, but also to form digital citizens who are responsible, have academic ethics, are capable of self-regulating their behavior, and are able to actively participate in the academic and social community in a digital environment.

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