

Review Article

Perception and emotion regulation behaviors of social media users during the Thai - Cambodian border crisis: A conceptual review

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Abstract: This article aims to explain and analyze the perception and emotion regulation behaviors of social media users during the Thai-Cambodian border crisis. It focuses on the interrelationship between public perception, communication, and the critical use of social media within a context where information and emotional responses directly influence public attitudes and decision-making. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks of perception, emotion regulation, and media literacy, the paper explores how individuals' behavioral responses to media stimuli reflect their ability to manage emotions under crisis conditions. As a conceptual paper, this study employs a systematic qualitative synthesis of existing communication paradigms and stress-coping literature. The analysis highlights that critical and mindful emotion regulation behaviors play a crucial role in mitigating social conflict, fostering collective understanding, and supporting effective crisis communication management. Furthermore, the study provides implications for communication strategies and policy development to encourage responsible and constructive media engagement in future crises.

Keywords: Perception; Emotion Regulation; Social Media; Critical Judgment; Crisis Communication Management

1. Introduction

This manuscript is structured as a Conceptual Review Paper designed to evaluate, synthesize, and critique established cognitive, psychological, and behavioral frameworks in the context of digital crisis communication.

The geopolitical and military tensions along the Thai-Cambodian border in 2025 developed from a series of bilateral border incidents and disputes. These events included localized symbolic activities conducted by tourists within the perimeter of the Ta Mueang Thom Castle in the Phanom Dong Rak District of Surin Province, the burning of the Tri Muk Pavilion located within the Chong Bok area of the Nam Yuen District in Ubon Ratchathani Province, and the digging of tactical trenches by military forces along the border sectors of Ta Phraya District and Khok Sung District in Sa Kaeo Province. Accompanied by a strategic reinforcement of military personnel and heavy hardware between March and May 2025, these incidents rapidly escalated into armed clashes across multiple border zones [1]. This crisis extended far beyond conventional national security parameters; it transformed into a critical public agenda heavily and continuously broadcasted across both traditional mass media and contemporary social media networks.

Mass media entities maintain a fundamental responsibility to disseminate information to the public under rigorous ethical frameworks and social accountability protocols. News coverage during such high-stakes national emergencies must strictly adhere to principles of factual accuracy, thorough deliberation, and the complete absence of subjective bias [2].

During the peak of the border crisis, digital data metrics revealed an unprecedented surge in digital public engagement. According to empirical telemetry gathered between July 24 and July 29, 2025, social media ecosystems experience massive public reactions to the developing conflict. On the first day of the armed clashes, the total number of users of the entire "clash-to-ceasefire" phase, reached historically high numbers, causing the cumulative digital engagement volume soared to 394.11

million interactions. A platform-by-platform market share breakdown shows TikTok commanding the majority share at 50.31%, closely followed by Facebook at 40.23%. In term of information originators, digital social media influencers generated the highest share of engagement at 58.62%, whereas traditional mainstream news agencies accounted for 33.20% [3].

2. Methodology and Literature Review Approach

To ensure academic rigor and systematic reliability, this conceptual review utilizes a structured qualitative literature synthesis method. The analytical approach follows a three-stage workflow:

1. Identification and Gathering: Selection of foundational literature on consumer behavior models, cognitive coping frameworks, and critical thinking paradigms alongside empirical data from the 2025 border crisis.

2. Screening and Categorization: Theoretical frameworks were screened based on their capacity to explain the triad of perception, emotion, and behavior within digital communication contexts.

3. 3. Synthesis and Integration: The selected frameworks specifically Cohen and Areni's Consumer Affect Model, Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence (SOC), and Critical Judgment typologies were systematically mapped to identify theoretical intersections, conceptual limitations, and unified operational path models.

3. Digital Media Metrics and Psychosocial Strain

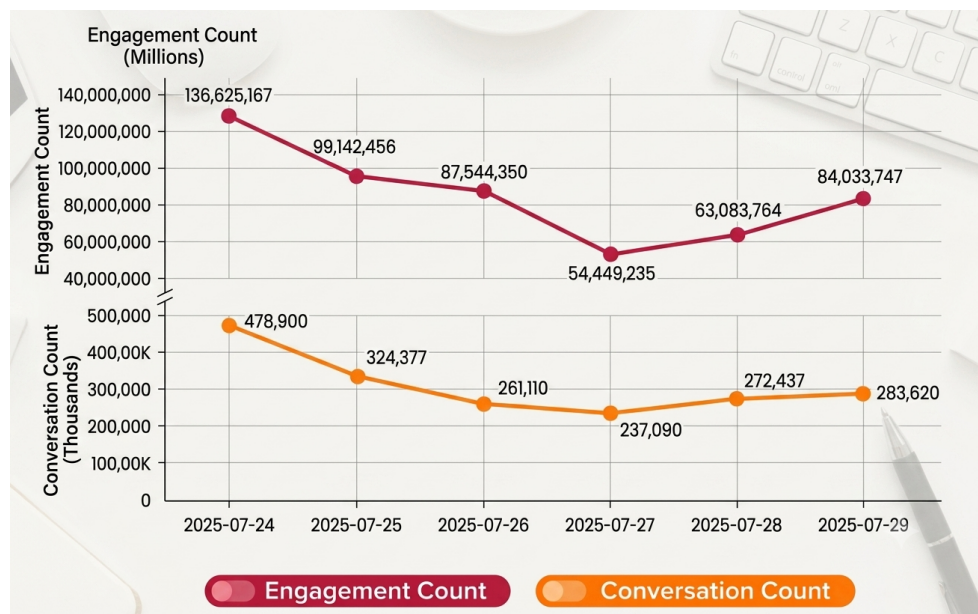


Figure 1. Engagement and Conversation Volume During the Thai-Cambodian “Clash-Ceasefire” Period (July 24-29, 2025)

Source: Dataset compiled by Wisesight and Thai Media Fund (2025).

In high-tension environments, consuming highly volatile, violent, or urgent news can directly destabilize an individual's psychological state inducing acute stress at both conscious and subconscious levels (Figure 1). Under these circumstances, emotion regulation emerges as an indispensable cognitive asset. Emotion regulation constitutes the foundational core of Emotional Intelligence (EI), which is defined as an individual's capacity to perceive, regulate, navigate, and dynamically adapt their own emotions alongside the emotional states of others. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that allowing unmitigated negative emotional states to persist without psychological interventions severely compromises both physiological stability and psychological health [4]. Concurrently, Bar-On

(2000) posits that these psychological states do not merely impact behavioral expressions; they are deeply intertwined with an individual's holistic well-being and long-term quality of life [5].

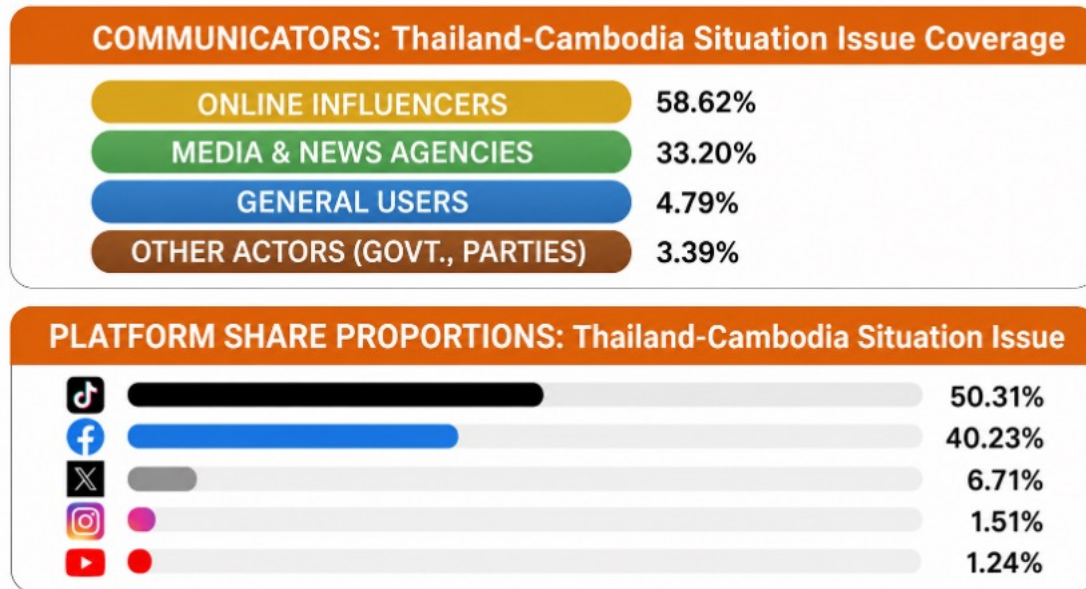


Figure 2. Proportionate Breakdown of Engagement by Communicator Type and Social Media Platform
Source: Statistical dataset compiled by Wisesight and Thai Media Fund (2025).

The rapid velocity of contemporary digital communications, especially during geopolitical crises, elevates platforms such as Facebook, X, YouTube, and TikTok into primary channels for disseminating “Breaking News” and conducting “Live Reporting” straight from the conflict zones. While this instantaneous stream satisfies the public’s immediate demand for real-time information, it frequently exposes audiences to unverified content, misinterpretations, and intense psychological pressure. The cognitive processing of information received via social media networks significantly dictates user attitudes, generating polarized positive or negative predispositions toward the ongoing situation [6]. Consequently, developing advanced methodologies for mitigating negative psychological affect and managing stress is vital for media consumers during crises (Figure 2).

To mitigate emotional strain and maintain psychological equilibrium amid dense, complex information warfare, users must cultivate specific cognitive competencies. These include:

- Practicing focused mindfulness or meditation.
- Enhancing core communication competencies, specifically critical reading and active listening.
- Deploying objective, criteria-based evaluations of media messages.

Furthermore, post-consumption stress mitigation frameworks must incorporate systemic media literacy and disciplined judgment. This involves selecting verified, auditable information sources and building robust social support networks such as psychological counseling services and fact-driven online communities. These collective measures systematically reduce cognitive stress and preserve the psychological well-being of the populace during the border crises.

4. Theoretical Framework of Emotion Regulation

The theoretical foundations of emotion regulation within consumer and media psychology are prominently anchored in the behavioral paradigms established by Cohen and Areni (1991). Their framework posits that emotions do not merely manifest as isolated internal experiences. Instead, they operate within a dynamic causal nexus linking Perception, Emotion, and Behavior [7]. According to this paradigm, an emotional episode is triggered when an individual encounters a specific environmental stimulus or crisis scenario. This external stimulus undergoes internal cognitive processing, interpretation, and appraisal. The nature of this appraisal dictates the intensity and valence of the resulting emotional state. Once an individual transitions into a heightened emotional state, that emotion directly guides both

positive and negative behavioral outcomes. These outcomes manifest as verbal expressions, facial gestures, physical posturing, micro-level social interactions, and macro-level decision-making processes.



Figure 3. Conceptual Model of the Behavioral Transformation Process

Source: Re-drawn and synthesized based on the consumer affect model from Cohen and Areni (1991).

This conceptual model illustrates that emotions are not merely spontaneous, isolated internal reactions. Instead, they are deeply rooted in social interactions that shape interpersonal communication and relationship dynamics, particularly during times of high uncertainty, economic instability, political shifts, or civil conflict. Investigating these emotion regulation mechanisms provides critical insights into how individuals process information and adapt behaviorally during crises. Utilizing Cohen and Areni's framework offers a structured baseline for examining how affect influences decision-making, digital communication behaviors, and psychosocial adaptation strategies during national emergencies (Figure 3).

5. The Role of the Sense of Coherence (SOC) Framework in Stress Management

Emotion Regulation extends beyond individual affect regulation; it is deeply embedded within broader stress-coping mechanisms. This dynamic can be comprehensively explained through Aaron Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence (SOC) framework, a core component of his Salutogenesis theory. SOC is conceptualized as a global orientation that expresses the extent to which an individual possesses a pervasive, enduring thought dynamic feeling of confidence that their environments are predictable, and that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected. It serves as an internal psychological mechanism that enables individuals to efficiently manage severe pressure and systemic uncertainty. The SOC architecture relies on three interrelated core dimensions:

1. **Comprehensibility:** The cognitive capacity to perceive internal and external stimuli as structured, predictable, and clear rather than chaotic or accidental.
2. **Manageability:** The instrumental belief and perception that appropriate resources are available to meet the demands posed by these stimuli.
3. **Meaningfulness:** The motivational dimension wherein life's challenges are viewed as worthy of investment, commitment, and emotional engagement, treating stressors as welcome challenges rather than paralyzing burdens.

Individuals possessing a high SOC score demonstrate an advanced capacity to cognitively structure complex, ambiguous crises into clear, comprehensible frameworks. They actively locate and deploy Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs) to mitigate stressors, transforming threatening situations into opportunities for constructive resolution and personal growth [8].

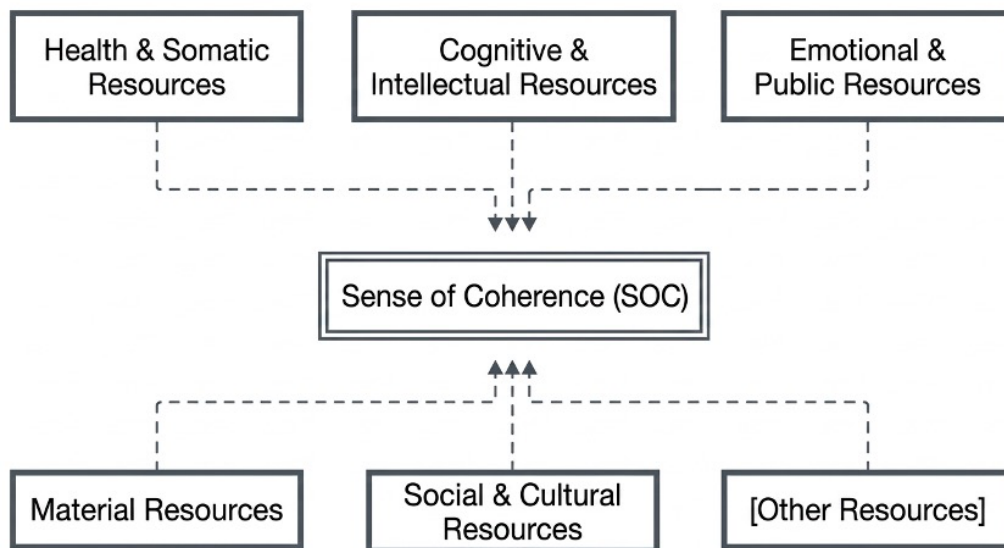


Figure 4 Conceptual Architecture of Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs).

Source: Re-structured based on Aaron Antonovsky's Salutogenic Design Model.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the core engine of adaptive stress management is the Sense of Coherence (SOC), which is continuously fueled by a multi-dimension matrix of Generalized Resistance Resources (GRRs):

- Material Resources: Tangible assets, economic stability, and infrastructure.
- Cognitive & Intellectual Resources: Knowledge bases, critical intelligence, and structural literacy.
- Health & Somatic Resources: Physical constitution, biological resilience, and medical access.
- Social & Cultural Resources: Kinship networks, community safety nets, institutional support systems, and normative cultural values.
- Emotional & Psychic Resources: Self-efficacy, psychological balance, and internal stability.

These resources systematically strengthen and individual's Comprehensibility, Manageability, and Meaningfulness. They allow individuals to navigate severe socio-political pressures with conscious awareness, structural rationale, and calculated composure.

In empirical research conducted by Pratoomthip and Chatwaran (2025) investigating stress dynamics among public health volunteers and individuals trained in alternative holistic medicine (Dharma-Wichai paradigm), human stress responses are categorized into four progressive tiers: Low, Moderate, High, and Severe [9]. This categorization aligns with the diagnostic standards of Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health [10]. A critical finding reveals that even when exposed to an identical stressor, an individual's psychological impact varies considerably based on their personal baseline, socioeconomic context, cultural background, environmental ecosystem, and internal personality traits. The primary drivers of stress span across domestic issues, occupational pressures, immediate social environments, macroeconomic challenges, personal health issues, and self-induced psychological demands.

This variability aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which asserts that stress arises from a dynamic transaction between environmental demands and personal resources [11]. It also supports Wallace's (1978) classification of stress into Exogenous (externally driven) and Endogenous (internally generated) stress vectors [12]. Integrating these empirical stress perspectives into Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence framework reveals distinct conceptual connections:

- Comprehensibility Interface: When an individual accurately identifies and assesses their specific stress tier (low, moderate, high, or severe), they transition from a state of ambiguous anxiety to an analytical, systematic understanding of the issue.
- Manageability Interface: Accessing instrumental support structures such as peer discussions, recreational stress-relief activities, robust social networks, professional counseling, or psychiatric care

during severe manifestations empowers individual with the confidence that they possess the necessary means to navigate the stressor.

- **Meaningfulness Interface:** Intentionally applying spiritual philosophies, ethical principles, mindfulness exercises, or scriptural reflection constructs a positive cognitive framework. This transforms situational suffering into a meaningful opportunity for inner learning and spiritual maturity.

Thus, the SOC construct acts as a primary differentiator in stress management. When facing identical socio-political or military crises, individuals with a highly developed SOC can more effectively comprehend, manage, and extract constructive meaning from stressful experiences.

6. The Dimensions of Critical Judgment in Media Consumption

Critical judgment is defined as the intellectual capacity to deploy objective reason, evaluate complex evidence, and formulate calculated decisions based on verified facts. Rooted in philosophy and cognitive psychology, critical judgment serves as a cornerstone of Critical Thinking. Ennis (1993) defines critical judgment as a reflective process focused on evaluating the credibility and core value of propositions or argument [13]. Facione (2011) expands this definition, stating that critical judgment includes a suite of cognitive skills: purposeful interpretation, analytical evaluation, evidence-based inference, and systematic explanation [14]. Within communication ecosystems, critical judgment is classified into three operational categories (Table 1):

Table 1. Functional Typologies of Critical Judgment

Typology	Operational Focus & Definition	Application in Crisis Contexts
Epistemic Judgment	Evaluating the objective validity, reliability, factual integrity, and evidentiary backing of incoming data.	Verifying border casualty counts and troop movements against independent journalistic tracking.
Value Judgment	Assessing the normative ethics, appropriateness, moral standing, or ideological bias of communicated text.	Dissecting nationalist propaganda or hate speech targeting foreign nationals on digital spaces.
Practical Judgment	Formulating optimal, behavioral decisions and action paths based on situational demands.	Deciding whether to share an unverified news report or choosing to temporarily disengage from social platforms to preserve mental health.

Source: Formatted and structured from conceptual typologies compiled by Ennis (1993) and Facione (2011).

Critical judgment serves as an essential cognitive filter for managing information, especially within social media networks characterized by high data velocity and viral misinformation. Angkhana (2021) notes that media literacy and critical judgment enable media consumers to interrogate content designed to evoke strong negative emotions, such as anger, panic, or xenophobic fear. This skill set allows users to verify source credibility and audit evidentiary support before accepting information [15].

Similarly, Wattanee (2017) examines these dynamics among professional journalists, noting that media practitioners must apply strict critical judgment to evaluate the reliability of crowdsourced social media data before integrating it into formal news broadcasts [16]. Whether operating as an end-consumer or a professional journalist, critical judgment serves as an essential filter to interpret evaluate, and verify information quality. This cognitive process maps directly onto the Comprehensibility and Manageability dimensions of the SOC model, allowing individuals to navigate high-stress informational landscapes with empirical clarity and strategic efficacy.

7. Stress Categorization and Coping Typologies

Stress is defined as a state of psychological or physiological tension that arises when an individual perceives that environmental demands tax or exceed their adaptive resources, threatening their systemic equilibrium. If unmanaged, prolonged stress can lead to severe physiological and psychological disorders. Selye (1974) classifies stress into three primary categories based on duration and systemic impact [17]:

- Acute Stress: Short-term psychological tension that triggers rapidly but dissipates quickly once the immediate provocative situation terminates.
- Chronic Stress: Long-term, cumulative psychological pressure that persists over extended durations, severely degrading mental and physical health.
- Eustress: Positive, productive stress that enhances cognitive motivation, stimulates problem-solving behaviors, and drives personal development.

Systemic stress management is crucial for restoring psychological and physiological homeostasis. A broad body of international and domestic literature offers diverse intervention strategies. For instance, coping programs based on Lazarus and Folkman's models demonstrate significant efficacy in reducing academic and clinical anxiety among adolescents and nursing students [18-19]. Similarly, integrating Buddhist psychological paradigms such as structured meditation and focused mindfulness practices enables healthcare students to manage intense pressure during demanding clinical practicums [20]. Group counseling interventions and emotion regulation programs also significantly lower stress levels in university demographics. For older populations, establishing resilient social support networks mitigates chronic stress and lowers depression risks [21]. In corporate settings, operational strategies such as time management ergonomic environment optimization, and clear communication channels effectively reduce occupational burnout [22]. Globally recognized interventions including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) remain highly effective tools for mitigating stress and burnout within high-pressure professions.

The literature demonstrates that stress management interventions are diverse and must be tailored to the specific context of the target demographic across educational corporate, and daily life environments. Synthesizing psychological, spiritual, and social support models offers a comprehensive framework for building sustainable psychological resilience and reducing long-term mental health risks.

8. Integrated Theoretical Critique and Synthesis

Currently, communication models often treat cognitive evaluation and emotional filtering as separate functions. To address this gap, this section contrasts and synthesizes Cohen and Areni's Behavioral Transformation Model, Antonovsky's SOC, and Critical Judgment typologies to identify unique advantages and operational linkages.

- Cohen and Areni (1991): Effectively maps the reactive pathway from stimulus exposure to visceral emotion and behavior, but lacks internal coping mechanisms.
- Sense of Coherence (SOC): Provides a robust internal locus of resilience (Comprehensibility, Manageability, Meaningfulness) but does not specifically account for rapid digital information inputs.
- Critical Judgment Frameworks: Offer specific criteria for filtering content (Epistemic, Value, Practical) but can be overridden by strong physiological stress.

By integrating these models, Critical Judgment functions as the structural filter for the "Perception" stage in Cohen and Areni's sequence. Concurrently, a strong SOC acts as stabilizing core that prevents negative internal appraisals from expanding into severe chronic stress, facilitating a balanced behavioral output.

9. Unified Conceptual Framework

To integrate these frameworks (Figure 5), the following operational flow chart describes how external digital stimuli map to psychological resilience and behavioral outcomes during a crisis:

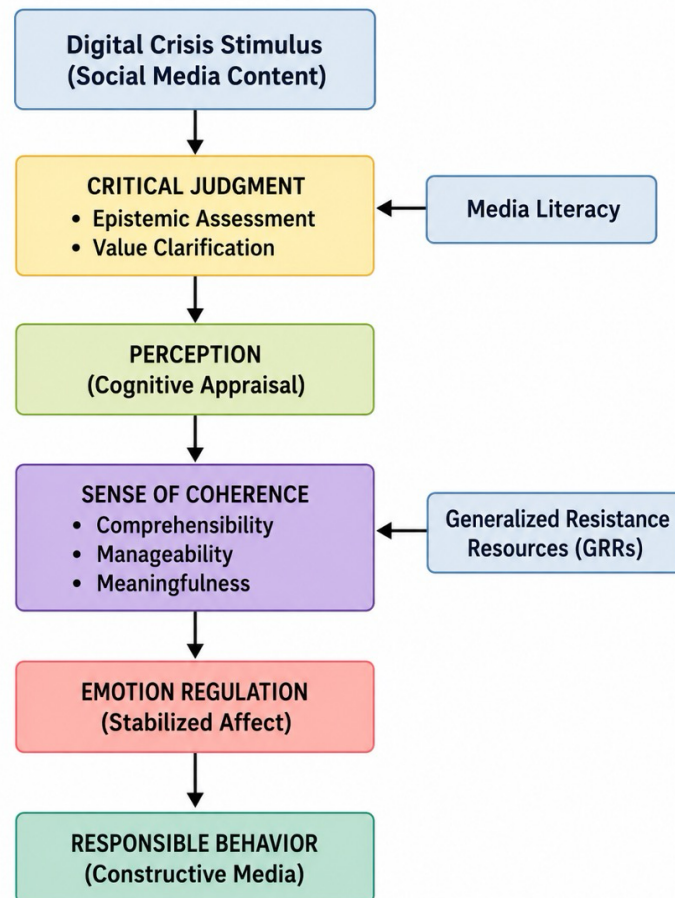


Figure 5. Unified Conceptual Framework

Source: Unified framework synthesized from Cohen and Areni (1991), Antonovsky (1987), and Critical Thinking literature.

The 2025 Thai-Cambodian border crisis underscored the powerful role of social media platforms in modern crisis communications. These networks deliver high-velocity, easily accessible information that drives massive public engagement. However, continuously consuming intense, graphic, or unverified crisis data without critical filters can trigger widespread acute stress, collective anxiety, and volatile emotional reactions. In this environment, advanced emotional management acts as an essential cognitive buffer. It prevents users from succumbing to negative psychological affect driven by digital information warfare.

10. Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

The 2025 Thai-Cambodian border crisis underscored the powerful role of social media platforms in modern crisis communications. These networks deliver high-velocity, easily accessible information that drives massive public engagement. However, continuously consuming intense, graphic, or unverified crisis data without critical filters can trigger widespread acute stress, collective anxiety, and volatile emotional reactions. In this environment, advanced emotional management acts as an essential cognitive buffer. It prevents users from succumbing to negative psychological affect driven by digital information warfare.

11. Recommendations Coping Strategies

To foster constructive media consumption and preserve public mental health, a multi-layered approach is required:

1. **Selective Source Consumption:** Users should prioritize verified information from reliable news organizations, credible social media influencers with transparent reporting track records, and confirmed state agencies.

2. **Information Rationing:** Setting strict daily time limits for tracking crisis news prevents cognitive overload and media fatigue.

3. **Mindfulness and Critical Synthesis:** Combining mindfulness techniques with critical thinking skills enables users to evaluate information objectively, minimizing emotional reactivity.

4. **Social Support Systems:** Building data-driven, fact-based online communities and accessible counseling networks offers vital psychological support during national emergencies.

Ultimately, learning to step back from the news cycle and treating media coverage as only one component of daily life is essential. This cognitive distance helps prevent over-identification with crisis events and supports personal psychological equilibrium. To translate these theoretical findings into practical interventions, key institutional stakeholders should implement the following targeted initiatives:

- **For State Entities and Government Bodies:** Establish non-partisan, transparent crisis information hubs to provide verified real-time updates, directly reducing public ambiguity and supporting public comprehensibility.

- **For Social Media Platforms:** Optimize user interfaces to provide warning labels on unverified breaking news while algorithmically boosting educational content related to media literacy.

- **For Content Creators and Media Producers:** Adhere to ethical objective reporting frameworks, avoiding clickbait titles that provoke anger or fear.

- **For Academic and Educational Institutions:** Integrate critical digital consumption models and stress-coping strategies into public curricula to strengthen collective long-term psychological resilience.

As a conceptual review article, this paper has specific limitations:

1. It relies primarily on secondary qualitative synthesis without localized primary field data.

2. The behavioral metrics are contextualized within the specific 2025 border incident data, meaning the findings may require adaptation when applied to alternative crisis forms like economic crashes or public health emergencies.

Future research should focus on developing digital toolkits and structured emotional management applications tailored for use during geopolitical and national crises. These interventions could include accessible online mindfulness modules, structured community discussion spaces, and crowdsourced, user-driven fact-checking platforms. Additionally, future studies should investigate how emotional response patterns vary across different age brackets, professional sectors, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Such research will help design targeted context-specific interventions that enrich academic communication theories and strengthen psychological coping strategies within society.

12. Patents

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