



Review Article

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Online media communication research in Vietnam 2003–2023: a review

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Abstract: This review essay provides a systematic overview of online media communication research conducted in Vietnam over recent decades. The authors employed comprehensive review methods to analyze published research papers, dissertations, and references within Vietnam, all of which discuss online media and communication studies and their influence on various aspects of the country's development. The review highlights that Vietnam's determination in pursuing a digital transformation strategy has significantly altered the landscape of media and communication within the country. As a result, research on online media and communication has grown in both quantity and diversity. Key topics of investigation include technological development, the roles of online media, journalistic ethics, audience behavior, social and business impacts, legal aspects, and digital security. Despite exploring various dimensions of media and communication digitalization, these studies share common characteristics. Notably, they focus heavily on the practical side of digitalization, aiming more at proposing solutions rather than contributing to the theoretical development of media and communication.

Keywords: digitalization; online media; online communication; Vietnam

1 Introduction

Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia, bordered by the sea on the east and south, by China on the north, and Laos and Cambodia on the west. Since Vietnam's

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reunification in 1975, the Communist Party has led the people in carrying out the country's renovation, modernization and industrialization (Vietnam Government 2024). Nowadays, Vietnam has become one of the most dynamic emerging countries in East and Southeast Asia. According to World Bank data, economic reforms since the launch of *Đổi Mới* in 1986, coupled with beneficial global trends, have enabled Vietnam to transition from one of the world's poorest nations to a middle-income economy in one generation. Between 2002 and 2022, GDP per capita increased 3.6 times, reaching almost US\$3,700 (World Bank 2023).

Growing with an economy heavily dependent on agricultural and industrial sectors in the past, Vietnam has been pushing digital technologies in recent years to drive economic growth, improve governance and promote social development. In 2020, the Vietnam government approved the national digital transformation program until 2025, with a vision to 2030 (Vietnam Government 2020). The first objective of this program is to use digital technologies and information and communication technologies in enhancing the delivery of government services, improve public administration, and increase government transparency and efficiency (Vietnam Digital Transformation Agenda 2023). Second, digital technology has been employed to boost the country's digital economy, which was estimated to be worth 148 billion USD in 2022, accounting for 14.26 percent of its GDP. It employs more than 1.5 million workers and expects to achieve 31 percent growth in gross merchandise value from 23 billion USD in 2022 to 49 billion USD in 2025 (Vietnam News Agency 2023). The third target of the country's digital program is ensuring that the benefits of digitalization are accessible to all citizens. Vietnam planned to provide fiber optic internet and 5G services nationwide for everyone, and for more than 80 percent of the population to have an electronic payment account (Nhật 2021). The program also includes efforts to promote digital literacy and skills training and the development of digital content and services (Vietnam Digital Transformation Agenda 2023).

Digitalization was received attention in the field of journalism, media and communication in Vietnam in the 1990s with the milestone event of the country's connection to the global internet in 1997. As a result of the development of the internet, a new medium, online newspapers, started in Vietnam. Since that moment, the very first online newspapers and online magazines have operated: *Quê Hương Online Magazine* (1997), *Vietnam Economy Times*, *Vietnam Agency*, *Party Organization Magazine* (1998) and *VnExpress* (2001). These pioneering online newspapers contributed to promoting the presence of Vietnam in the world, becoming the news bridge between the country and the overseas Vietnamese, and providing news and information about Vietnam to the rest of the world (Huỳnh et al. 2015). Two decades later, Vietnam now has 6 key multimedia agencies, 127 newspaper agencies, 671 magazine agencies, 72 broadcasting stations (Vietnam Plus 2023), and many of these

news media have an online version published on the internet. From 3.1 million users in 2003, the number of internet users in Vietnam reached 78.44 million at the start of 2024 with the internet penetration stood at 79.1 percent (Kemp 2024). Research shows that Vietnam has 72.7 million social media users, equating to 73.3 percent of the total population and 168.5 active cellular mobile connections which is equivalent to 169.8 percent of the total population (Kemp 2024). Like elsewhere, as Vietnam's online population grew, the traditional top-down information system was quickly replaced by a multi-direction information flow (Duong et al. 2019; Mach and Nash 2019). People can make important decisions in their life based on the diverse and fast information – from disease prevention, study, work, making a living, entertainment to expressing their opinions openly (Nguyễn 2021). Besides, the rise of digital technologies and social media has pushed for transformation changes in the media and communication industry.

With all these changes on a national scale, online media and communication have become popular themes in academic and applied research in recent years. This review essay aims at revealing the research interest in Vietnam and how these topics have been studied, as well as their implications and contributions.

2 Methodology

To collect data, we reviewed doctoral and master's dissertations and theses archived at the National Library of Vietnam and local university libraries, as well as studies published in recognized Vietnamese academic journals.

In the initial source, we identified approximately thirty studies centered on online journalism and media in the Vietnamese language from 2003 to 2023. These studies were conducted by the graduate students from three Vietnamese universities with accredited master's and doctoral programs in journalism and communications: Vietnam National University Hanoi, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City and the Academy of Journalism and Communications. These research – intensive programs offer integrated knowledge about media, society, culture, sustainable development, media management and economics. Recently, courses on digitalization in journalism and media have become pivotal, underscoring the significance of digital transformation in media production, distribution and management. Additionally, several studies were authored by researchers affiliated with other Vietnamese universities such as Hanoi Open University, Thuong Mai University, Dong Thap University, and Dalat University. These institutions support research on the impacts of digital communication on Vietnamese students and young adults. Approximately five papers, mainly published between 2017 and 2022, were utilized in this context.

We also delved into the *Journal of Political and Communication* of the Academy of Journalism and Communication and the *Journalist Journal* of the Vietnam Journalist Association, covering the years from 2016 to 2023. These specialized journals, published in Vietnamese, are recognized by the State Council for Professorship as crucial scientific journals in this field (The State Council for Professorship 2024). About thirty-four journal articles related to the theme of digital media and communication from these journals were examined for this essay.

All the collected data have been reviewed by the three writers of this essay to define the main research objects, research approaches and contributions of each study. Based on these main research objects, we categorized the studies into the following sections: (i) Advocating for digital transformation; (ii) The roles of online media and communication in reporting national affairs, fighting fake news and encouraging public discussions; (iii) The journalists and complex ethical issues in the online environment; (iv) Active audiences; (v) The impacts of digital communication on social identities and communication behaviours; (vi) The adaptation of enterprises' communication within digitalization; and (vii) State regulations and cybersecurity. In each section, we identified prominent concerns, perspectives, uses of theory, and research methods. We also introduced or cited some typical studies in each area to help readers understand the topics and the main opinions of various researchers more clearly.

3 Main Research Topics

3.1 Advocating for digital transformation

Along with the increasing popular usage of the internet in the 2000s was the gradual transformation of the media. The operations of the very first online news websites, such as *Quê hương* (The Homeland), *Nhân dân* (The People), *The Vietnam Economic Times*, *VnExpress*, *Vietnam Net*, and *Voice of Vietnam*, led to studies focusing on features of the new media and its prominent position in the media landscape at that time (Nguyễn 2003, 2004; Phan 2007). Publishing content online in addition to the traditional format was mentioned as the essential approach for the print and broadcast media in the internet age (Đặng 2008). Developing internet portals was also mentioned as crucial for the state internal and external communication (Trần 2008).

Later, rapid technological developments led to new applications in the media industry, known as mobile journalism, multimedia, multiplatform media, social television, artificial intelligence in the media, virtual media content, etc. Studies conducted under the approach of technology innovation have shown the excitement

and advocacy for new technology applications. Examples are those confirming multimedia as the trend of online news media (Ngô 2019; Nguyễn 2007, 2020, Nguyễn 2022a), emphasizing the importance of developing a digital media ecosystem and transforming the newspapers' or broadcasts' content in appropriating mobile devices, internet or social media environment (Cáp 2023; Lê 2021; Nguyễn 2020; 2022b; Phạm 2021; Phan 2020; Tạ 2023), or encouraging convergence as a crucial model for media organizations in the digital era (Võ 2015, Nguyễn 2020). Academic researchers are now also paying attention to the growth of artificial intelligence (AI). In 2019 a survey of more than one hundred journalists in Ho Chi Minh City revealed that AI applications in newsrooms had just started, and 80 percent of the journalists believed AI could not take the place of human reporters (Nguyễn and Lê 2020). Four years later, AI has become a phenomenon which is mentioned in almost all the reports about the media and communication context. Newsrooms are advised to invest in digital transformation and are applying AI in creating, managing and delivering the content on the internet (Đỗ 2023). Not only focusing on national news agencies, researchers are also interested in deploying digital content in local newsrooms (Lê 2022; Nguyễn 2020). The authors concluded there were many events that were worth making into multimedia articles, but the newsrooms missed them; instead, newsrooms turned tasteless and unworthy events and issues into multimedia articles just because they were simple and easy to work with. Commonly used research methods in these studies are often in-depth interviews with experts, surveys and content analysis. These studies have made important contributions in advocating for the application of new technologies in content production, editorial management, and public outreach.

From the state management perspectives, at the end of 2023 the Ministry of Information and Communication of Vietnam published the ranking report of digital maturity of all the news agencies, which reflects the digitalization progress in this field. The results show that only 3.66 percent of news agencies reached the excellent level, 8.06 percent were at good, 13.19 percent were at rather good, 12.09 percent were at the moderate level and 63 percent were weak. The indicators that were used to evaluate and measure the maturity level of digital transformation include the following five: (1) strategy; (2) digital infrastructure, digital platform and information security; (3) organizational and professional uniformity; (4) audiences; and (5) level of digital technology application (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper 2023). The indicators and sub-indicators of this report show that the views of press management agency in Vietnam on digital transformation are quite comprehensive. Digital transformation is not only related to new technology applications but also to long-term development strategies, funds for digital transformation, economic efficiency of digital transformation, copyright protection in the digital environment, creation of new experiences for users, and optimization of production processes. The results of

evaluating and ranking media digital transformation are the basis for the agencies to monitor the annual digital transformation implementation roadmap of their units.

Generally, studies conducted under the approach of technology and innovations show the vibrant development of the digital revolution and the determination of the industry in achieving digital transformation goals. Researchers who are interested in technological aspects focus on applying digital innovations in media organizations, publishing platforms, new content formats, etc. Theoretical discussions were rarely mentioned in these articles.

3.2 The roles of online media in reporting public affairs, fighting against fake news, and encouraging public discussions

Under the impact of digitalization, the role of online media has been the subject of extensive academic research recently. These roles include supporting the government in combating incorrect and hostile content by presenting positive information to counteract negative material, and providing transparent and in-depth information about national and international affairs across many aspects, from economy to social development issues, and fighting against fake news. Additionally, the internet and social media assume a constructive role in regulating relations between citizens and the state, fostering an environment conducive to more equitable dialogue within Vietnamese society.

As an effective mouth piece and propaganda tool of the Party and State, the Vietnamese press in general, and the online press in particular, play an important role in safeguarding national security and the Party's ideological foundation, contributing to protecting the independence, sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country. However, the content of messages aimed at protecting national security on online media is not timely, innovative, or specific (Nguyen 2021). Another researcher made the point that online newspapers must have a mission to combat wrong and hostile views by presenting positive information to counter negative material (Nguyen 2022). Nguyen (2022) stated that online media fight against false and hostile information, not against dissent as the forces have cunningly said, but providing transparent and in-depth information about national and international affairs, thereby bringing an objective understanding to the audience. However, the author also analyzed that online news media have been quite slow compared to the pace at which false and hostile information spreads on the internet. This content is often very long, so the public does not have the patience to read it. The articles also lack of the sarcasm and sharpness (Nguyen 2022). Other researchers agreed that online

news media play a vital role in protecting the Party's ideology and developing the Party in the industrial revolution 4.0 (Đinh 2023; Khánh 2023; Trương 2023).

Besides, researchers explored the roles of online news media in reporting national and local economic development issues: examples include the development of the fisheries industry in the Song Hau River region (Lê 2020), the tourism industry in Vinh Phuc province (Phùng 2020) and urban management in Hà Nội (Nguyễn 2018). Online news studies have also concerned the way in which the new media report cultural norms and ethnic minorities (Chu 2018; Lê 2020; Trần 2018; Trương 2020), gender equality issues (Nguyễn 2018; Phạm 2021), and environmental issues (Đỗ 2021; Trần 2021; Triệu et al. 2022). Content analysis is often employed to prove that disadvantaged groups need to have a more equal voice in the online news media.

Alongside the aforementioned roles, online media has taken on the responsibility of providing the truth to combat fake news in the digital information environment. In recent years, social media has become the most vulnerable platform for the spread of fake news. Đinh (2021) commented that fake news persists because the public lacks reliable sources or means to verify information, in addition to the fact that the legal system has not yet been fully developed. Mainstream media, including online media, should step up to help the public distinguish between real and fake news. Đinh (2021) also recommended that the media build a dedicated response team, with expertise in various fields, to address misinformation on social networks and create public trust. In fact, some news media in Vietnam have also opened the collum for fact-checking. These include the Fake-True page from Tuoi Tre (Tuoi Tre 2024) and the Fact Check channel to verify information on TikTok, aimed at the Gen Z public, from the online news media of Vietnam News Agency (Vietnam Plus 2024).

In terms of providing spheres for public discussions, Vietnam has witnessed the growth of the online groups, blogs and social media networks in the recent decades. Social media has been seen as the fifth power in monitoring the media organizations. It has created an army of citizen journalists with its strength in creating interactive networks, promoting social debates, and supporting the news media to serve the audience quickly and correctly. However, it has also speeded up the tabloidization of the news media in Vietnam and led to ethical warnings because of the lack of professional journalistic standards (Nguyễn 2015). Some researchers believe that the news media and social fanpages have created the space for two-way interactions between the news media and their audiences; however because of the potential risks, monitoring this content is required (Bùi 2019; Doãn 2016). Taking the managerial approach, Phan (2020) recommended that newsrooms pay attention to the media agenda-setting function in order to impact public opinions and collective activities. Other researchers proposed creating the public sphere for discussion on the new

media and employing key opinion leaders who have profound knowledge in specific fields in order to orient the public discussions (Nguyễn et al. 2022).

The studies about the roles of the digital media are mostly based on theoretical perspectives on press functions from the Marxist view of journalism. Some studies also refer to Western theories such as gate-keeping theory, agenda-setting theory, two-step flows of information, etc. However, the use of theory in research primarily aims to create a foundation for conducting empirical methods. This approach helps identify existing problems and propose solutions, rather than focusing on discussing and developing the theories themselves.

3.3 The journalists and complex ethical issues in the online environment

The internet environment has introduced complicated ethical issues in journalism and mass communication, including exploiting personal pain, lack of verification, insensitivity, inhumane treatment of vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents, and inconsistency between journalists' actions and words.

Phan (2017), through an analysis of various articles published on online news media, revealed a troubling reality: the press frequently exploits personal pain. Many individuals featured in these stories are subject to unfair and somewhat callous treatment. These manifestations often surface subtly, such as through an interview question, a specific camera angle, an edited response, or a manipulative form of role-playing designed to elicit information from the subject. The author also notes that journalists often face extremely difficult choices, as they struggle to determine the ethical course of action in these situations.

Dinh (2018) commented on the troubling trend of some journalists, who disregarding professionalism, responsibility, and conscience, exploit modern digital technology to achieve personal goals. This trend includes reporting news without verifying sources, driven by a mentality of "post in the morning, backlash at noon and removal in the afternoon." There remains a lack of specific regulations on penalties for violations related to editing and removing posts without justification. Currently, the article editing and removing tool of the Vietnam Journalists' Association, as well as regulations concerning legal deposit of online materials, only require the agencies which published the removed or amended articles to provide official explanations rather than engaging in specific legal consequences.

Nguyen (2022) further highlights the concerning state of journalists' ethics, pointing out instances of insensitivity and even inhumanity towards vulnerable groups, including children and adolescents. Furthermore, he observes a tendency to presume guilt when criticizing on social media, as well as a troubling inclination to

shy away from confronting the truth, often opting for silence or evasion, even when faced with egregious violations by themselves, their colleagues, or within the profession. Additionally, Nguyen points out the two-sided nature between the actions and words of journalists, noting a disparity between what is written for newspapers and what is expressed on social media platforms. Indeed, the consensus among these authors point out the urgent need for a comprehensive set of professional ethics rules tailored to address specific situations within each press agency. Additionally, there is a call for adjustments to legal documents pertaining to journalist ethics, information gathering, reporting, and correction processes.

In addition to highlighting the negative ethical issues stemming from journalists' actions in the digital environment, another perspective emphasizes the pivotal role journalists play in combating and mitigating the adverse effects of fake news. Dinh (2023) mentions the importance of journalists in this regard, emphasizing their responsibility to safeguard the integrity of information disseminated to the public. Drawing evidence from the Dong Tam event,¹ he scrutinized the pivotal role of journalists in capturing public sentiment and guiding information dissemination to foster stability within the online community. Notably, journalists have been proactive in delivering official information via social media platforms, thereby steering public discourse and responses. Moreover, Dinh underscored the importance of journalists leveraging social networks to encourage public engagement, particularly among the youth, disseminate humane messages, and showcase positive examples or models.

1 The land dispute in Đồng Tâm Commune, Mỹ Đức District, Hanoi has been a significant issue. The Sênh field in Đồng Tâm Commune is classified as national defense land. The authorities organized dialogues with the people of Đồng Tâm Commune to ensure adherence to legal regulations. Since 2013, Mr. Lê Đình Kinh and several others have established the “consensus group,” mobilizing many residents to file complaints, accuse the government of land seizure, and conduct multiple illegal detentions. In 2020, when authorities intervened to prevent and detain violators hiding in Mr. Lê Đình Kinh's house, these individuals used grenades, petrol bombs, and spears to attack law enforcement officers, resulting in the deaths of three police officers. The People's Procuracy sentenced six defendants for “murder” and 23 defendants for “resisting law enforcement officers.” Information about the incident has become a hot topic on social media platforms, with numerous sources disseminating unverified and misleading information, causing public confusion and unrest, inciting people to gather in Đồng Tâm for marches, disrupting public order, attacking police forces, and opposing the government - The information are collected by the authors themselves upon official media sources in Vietnam.

3.4 Active audiences

Audiences in the digital era are assumed to take a more proactive and personalized role, emerging as the decisive force in the content creation process across digital platforms. This shift prompts researchers to outline new directions for news development strategies, emphasizing the need to build technology platforms tailored to the evolving needs of this new generation. Moreover, efforts are being made to create conditions conducive to greater public participation in journalism activities, fostering a more vibrant media landscape.

Đặng (2013) made preliminary observations regarding the significant shift in public behavior from a “reading culture” to an “audiovisual culture;” from a “pen culture” to an “online culture;” and from an “elite culture” to a “consumer culture.” Despite these transitions, the public has not fully recognized its proper role within this evolving cultural landscape. In the study by Nguyen (2021) on the utilization of citizens’ speech to exercise the right to freedom of speech in the press, a noteworthy finding emerged. Out of a total of 821 individuals surveyed, only 17 actively engaged in exercising their right to freedom of expression in journalistic works. These individuals served as witnesses or spokespersons within journalistic content. The study concludes that citizens are not yet actively exercising their “right to speak” in the press. Analysis of citizens’ statements within journalistic works indicates a prevailing sense of insecurity among individuals when speaking to the press. This highlights concern regarding the inadequacy of existing laws to protect citizens’ safety during the exercise of expanded democratic rights.

In light of the increasing penetration of social media in Vietnam and the rapid evolution of technology platforms, Truong (2021) introduced the concept of the “smart public.” The smart public represents a new generation of individuals who are willing to pay for access to exclusive information. They exhibit distinct reading preferences, engaging with both unofficial information from social networks and official information from the press. Moreover, they possess the ability to analyze and evaluate information independently, facilitating self-improvement and effective content filtering. In this dynamic, the smart public takes on a leading role, shaping media narratives by guiding the media to deliver content that aligns with their preferences and interests.

Le (2023) further builds upon the concept of the smart public by identifying them as the “high-tech public,” characterized by their capabilities in integrating multimedia content and utilizing new media platforms. Importantly, this segment of the public actively engages with information, demonstrating increased participation in the consumption, interaction and even creation and dissemination of content within the online environment. To (2023) proposed the concept of digital citizens,

defining them as “individuals equipped with digital capacity and skills within a stable political and legal environment conducive to digital living.” According to this perspective, digital citizens exhibit several key characteristics: a certain level of technological proficiency, digital capabilities to apply across various aspects of life, awareness of the dynamics of the online world and digital culture, foundational concepts related to the internet, responsible use of technology and adherence to information ethics, a positive attitude toward multimedia communication, and respect for privacy in online discussions.

Later research recognized the public influence on journalistic activities that shape media narratives and foster a shift in journalism strategy. Le (2024) captures this transition, indicating that the public uses social networks as a primary tool for accessing information, thereby accelerating the dissemination of news. The public acts as managers, supervisors, and social critics, thereby exerting significant influence on the social standing of media organizations and press agencies. The comments and feedback provided by the public have emerged as a distinctive source of information that directly shapes the content of press agency products. Moreover, public behavior serves as valuable data for assessing the effectiveness of news agency products and for refining communication strategies.

Generally, the most prominent feature of the new public generation is their significant contribution to the content of journalistic products and their increasingly explosive role in critiquing social issues on mass media. It can be seen that the public is becoming more proactive, with a high degree of personalization, and is becoming decisive entities in the content creation process on digital platforms. This also poses new research directions on strategies for news development and the construction of technological platforms to meet the needs of the new public generation.

3.5 The impacts of digital communication on social identities and communication behaviours

In terms of social aspects, researchers reveal the Internet and social media’s dual impact on different social classes’ identities and behaviors in Vietnam. The advent of the internet and social media platforms has revolutionized how individuals articulate their identities and cultivate interpersonal connections. In this way, Nguyen et al. (2020) investigated young Vietnamese women’s self-presentations on Facebook and discovered that although social media platforms like Facebook offer opportunities for knowledge acquisition, networking, and activism, their impact in the Vietnamese context is complex because of their reinforcement of neoliberal

values alongside the preservation of Confucian ethics and socialist ideology through surveillance mechanisms.

In the same discussion, Ngo et al. (2008) stated that young Vietnamese individuals (in the capital of Hanoi) utilized the Internet to gather fresh sexual images and concepts, which they subsequently integrated into their behaviors and identities, leading to the development of novel sexual scripts through online communication. Additionally, online communication has not only altered individuals' self-perceptions but has also had a substantial impact on intimate personal relationships. Nguyen et al. (2022) discovered indications of a connection between the quality of parent-child relationships and internet usage behaviors. More importantly, the study suggested that a positive relationship between children and parents was influenced by the quality, frequency, and interactive activities in parent-adolescent communication, including supporting parents in their internet use. Therefore, it can be stated that the Internet provides novel avenues for individuals to express and delve into personal identities, including aspects that are typically not openly discussed in public (such as sexual ones), and adapt their intimate relationships. Nonetheless, the integration of these neoliberal principles within the Vietnamese context is intricately intertwined with specific cultural and political dynamics in Vietnam.

The popularity of the internet also exerts a positive impact on the acquisition of life knowledge, from general information to in-depth expertise in specific fields. Studies by Kaila and Tarp (2019) and Nguyen et al. (2023) illuminated the close connection between Internet access and agricultural productivity. Specifically, farmers were able to apply fertilizer more effectively as a consequence of the knowledge they gained from the Internet, which increased the volume of overall agricultural output by 6.8 percent (Kaila and Tarp 2019). Whereas, according to Nguyen et al. (2023), Internet use helped more marginalized groups, such as households headed by women and ethnic minorities or families with lower education attainment, to increase agricultural productivity. Thus, it can be seen that the Internet's ability to disseminate knowledge has led to improvement of the living conditions of many farmers in Vietnam who usually have limited education.

In particular, the utilization of social networks for information navigation, especially among the younger demographics, is also a topic under active discussion. The work of Vu et al. (2022) on 1,300 students at five universities in Ho Chi Minh City revealed the channel the students mostly used (Facebook) and the topic they were mostly interested in (social and cultural issues). More importantly, given that the use of social media exerts diverse influences on learning and shapes student learning outcomes by facilitating the reception, exchange and interaction of information with faculty, it is advisable to devise strategies aimed at guiding public opinion among students toward a positive trajectory within Vietnamese universities.

Additionally, it's increasingly common, particularly among younger generations, to use social media to research topics before making decisions. A study by Truong et al. (2023) demonstrated the beneficial impact of social media on the travel decisions of generation Z in Vietnam. Thus, the most significant influence on their travel choices, in particular, comes from the quality of information found on social networks. However, as Ho and Phan's study (2017) has indicated, accessing social networks (Facebook) in particular and the Internet in general also brings with it concerns about privacy violations and the leakage of personal information, especially via online advertising. On the other hand, it is anticipated that online social networks will continue to proliferate in contemporary Vietnamese society thanks to their beneficial effects on the dissemination of knowledge and helpful information.

Moreover, numerous scholarly studies have demonstrated the considerable potency of the Internet and social networking sites in engendering user dependency, with sustained and frequent utilization serving to intensify this reliance, especially among the young generation. Studies by Tran et al. (2017), Do et al. (2020) and Doan et al. (2022) collectively underscored the notable prevalence of Internet and social networking engagement among youth in Vietnam. Among them, the investigation of Do et al. (2020) depicted distinct user characteristics and their respective perspectives regarding excessive Internet usage. For example, urban youth demonstrate a greater propensity to perceive frequent Internet utilization as having a negligible impact on their health in comparison to their rural and older counterparts (Do et al. 2020). On the other hand, articles by Tran et al. (2017) and Doan et al. (2022) related mental health issues to young people's addiction to social media and the Internet. In particular, frequent or excessive usage of the Internet and social media frequently induce heightened psychological arousal (Tran et al. 2017), potentially leading to adverse mental health outcomes, such as stress or fear of missing out (FOMO) (Doan et al. 2022).

On the bright side, social media encourages activism and self-expression while promoting new behaviors and upholding established values. Internet use also boosts parent-child interactions by fostering excellent communication. Moreover, social media has an impact on student learning and participation in the classroom. These advantages are, however, outweighed by worries about invasions of privacy and the detrimental impacts that excessive internet use – such as stress and FOMO – has on one's mental health. While research indicates that social media and the internet generally have good effects, there are also potential risks, especially for younger generations.

3.6 The adaptation of enterprises' communication within digitalization

The business climate in Vietnam is changing significantly as a result of the rising penetration of online communication, particularly social media, into commercial activities. Researchers discovered that social media could produce considerable effects on Vietnamese enterprises' online business efficacy in four ways, namely, the acceptance of social media use, the risk of social media use, the number of social media users, and the variety of social media access methods (Nguyen and Vu 2019). In agreement with this perspective, Le's research (2022) provided additional insights into how businesses can utilize social media to affect consumer behaviors. Thus, as the content generated on social media by Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) plays crucial roles in building customers' beliefs and affecting their purchasing intention, businesses should invest in constructing and boosting KOLs' social networks in communication activities (Le 2022: 267).

Regarding social impacts on specific industries, there are works by Tran et al. (2016) and Tran (2023). While the former considered social media's substantial presence in the travel and tourist industry and how it appeared in search engine results pages, the latter study reinforced the importance of taking advantage of the social aspects of communication, such as social media, e-commerce platforms for food businesses, especially with GenZ, the main objective in the research. Both studies confirmed that consumers frequently explore social networks for information about goods and services and use this platform to compare and contrast different products and service offerings. Furthermore, the popularity of social networks as well as their extraordinary ability to interact with users are transforming search behaviors for travel information (Tran et al. 2016) and having a positive influence on customer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Tran 2023).

On another front, Phan et al. (2022) and Tran et al. (2019) investigated social media's influence on specific companies, such as Mobifone – a company in the telecommunication industry, and CGV – a media company. While firm-created content by CGV Cinemas had direct and positive effects on brand awareness/association and brand loyalty, as suggested by Tran et al. (2019), customers routinely visited social networking sites and social commerce platforms to learn about products that bring optimal value before purchasing MobiFone products/services, as illustrated by Phan et al. (2022).

Businesses nowadays not only use social media for their operations but also adapt their marketing strategies to fit the new environment. Nguyen et al. (2020) concluded that after the Covid 19 pandemic, Vietnamese people became accustomed to online shopping, which created a golden opportunity for online marketing to

thrive. They also emphasized that the proliferation of the internet has created numerous marketing opportunities by generating new venues that are more innovative and customer focused. Moreover, it's also evident that conventional marketing methods, including word-of-mouth (WOM), are making the switch to internet platforms. Pham (2020) provided an analytical lens of eWOM marketing's influence over Vietnamese consumers' decisions on online commercial platforms and illustrated that acceptance of eWOM has a direct beneficial impact on purchase intention. Concerning the application of online marketing communication in a specific industry, Nguyen and Nguyen (2022) summarized five online marketing strategies that Vietnam has been applying for internet tourism, including email, social media (SMM), search engine (SEM), blog, and website marketing. Thus, it is clear that most companies are moving their marketing efforts to online platforms where they can take many different forms and interact with customers more directly.

The banking and finance industry is one of the business sectors that has experienced a significant change in the context of digital transformation. The adoption of internet banking, specifically for bank transactions, is a subject covered in the research of Lin et al. (2015) as well as that of Nguyen-Viet and Ngoc Huynh (2021). In both works, perceived usefulness is considered an influencing factor in the adoption of internet banking in Vietnam. However, while Lin et al. (2015) added only perceived ease of use as another influencing factor, Nguyen-Viet and Ngoc Huynh (2021) listed attitude, perceived risk, innate innovativeness, domain-specific innovativeness, and internet experience among factors that might attract consumers to internet banking. In general, it is recommended that banks should aim to raise consumer groups' knowledge of online banking and urge those who are not aware of this service to use it through workshops, demos, video presentations, and marketing (Nguyen-Viet and Ngoc Huynh 2021).

Generally, research on Vietnam's business landscape emphasizes the critical role of social media and digital platforms in transforming business practices and consumer behaviors. Accordingly, social media has been demonstrated to enhance business efficacy, influence customer behavior, and reshape marketing strategies, with KOLs being essential in driving consumer trust and purchase decisions. The tourism, food, and telecommunications sectors are particularly impacted, with social media playing a key role in customer engagement and satisfaction. Plus, online marketing has gained prominence after the COVID 19 with a shift towards digital tactics such as eWOM and social media marketing. The acceptance of internet banking, driven by variables like perceived usefulness and customer innovativeness, is a clear example of the digital transition in banking. In short, there is a clear trend of businesses increasingly relying on digital platforms to connect with consumers and drive growth across industries.

3.7 State regulations and cyber security

The ongoing digital transformation within press and media activities in Vietnam has spurred significant research attention, particularly towards issues surrounding paid journalism and ethical considerations arising in this evolving landscape. Key areas of focus include digital copyright, information security, and network security where legal management measures remain limited.

According to Bui (2020), the fee-based press model in Vietnam is still in its nascent stages and is encountering several challenges. These include issues related to copyright ownership, concerns about public trust, shifts in behavior regarding accessing fee-based information, and the rapid development of new technologies. Pham (2022) offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that implementing a fee-based model when readers are accustomed to accessing content for free may pose risks, potentially driving them towards other platforms where fake news proliferates. In response to this challenge, she proposes several solutions. First, she recommends focusing on investing in high-quality information products to enhance experience and value to readers through formats such as long-form articles, e-magazines, mega-stories, data journalism, and infographics. Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of implementing measures to protect copyright, including blocking copying, scanning, and photographing news pages.

Pham's proposal (2022) regarding copyright and related rights protection in the press emphasizes the need for press agencies to establish alliances committed to respecting each other's copyrights and strictly adhering to intellectual property laws. She suggests implementing sanctions for cases of copyright infringement and developing a specific code of conduct to educate journalists on copyright awareness and responsibilities. Additionally, she recommends establishing standards for citing sources and obtaining permission from authors when using news articles online. On a related note, Nguyen (2023) addresses the challenge of balancing politics and the press economy when implementing fee-based models. She underscores the importance of harmonizing this relationship to ensure that the press does not prioritize profit over journalistic principles and purposes. To address this problem, the author proposes creating a mechanism to legalize journalistic business models that would set legal boundaries for generating revenue within the press industry.

The internet has indeed emerged as a space fraught with challenges for governments, serving as a battleground for influence from various large countries. In response, internet censorship has been employed as a necessary tool to control content and shape public opinion, with the aim of mitigating the risk of social upheaval and maintaining stability within the country. Consequently, the role and

limitations of policies and legal frameworks aimed at controlling cybersecurity are receiving increasing research attention in Vietnam.

A study of Vietnam's national sovereignty protection in cyberspace by Hoang (2021) indicates the inadequacies in the country's legal framework and international cooperation mechanisms concerning cybersecurity. Hoàng (2021) highlights the challenges in delineating the boundary between activities aimed at safeguarding national sovereignty and those perceived as encroachments on basic human freedoms. Nguyen (2022) also reiterates that Vietnam has yet to establish international legal principles to ensure international information security and peace in cyberspace, while Pham (2023) highlights the significant limitations in ensuring security within electronic newspapers. This situation calls for the development of synchronized response plans involving leaders at various levels, including supervisors, press agency leaders, journalists, and the general public. Other measures include legislative improvement of laws related to combating fake, harmful, and untrue information online; development of a comprehensive code of conduct for cyberspace; introduction of incentives to encourage research and development of local information software; support for the establishment of cybersecurity enterprises that produce cybersecurity equipment; and increased localization of cybersecurity products. Nguyen (2023) reinforces the lack of clarity in Vietnam's legal framework on cybersecurity. She also highlights challenges related to collecting evidence from digital sources, which can complicate the process of consolidating evidence for legal proceedings. Additionally, Nguyễn (2023) noted that the existing penalties may not be sufficient to deter cybercrimes effectively.

The emergence of new challenges, such as cybersecurity, paid journalism, and information copyright, underscores the importance of examining the shortcomings in current legal documents and making necessary adjustments. Bui (2023) comments on the need to amend the Press Law to address the evolving models and challenges of the modern press scene. The super desk model, which encompasses human resources, infrastructure, technology, and data sources, alongside AI-driven journalism, as well as the provision of cross-border content, should be included as normative subjects within the law. The proliferation of various forms of mass information activities with journalistic attributes, including social networks and content distribution platforms like YouTube and TikTok, presents significant challenges to press and information management. There is an urgent need for updated regulations in the Press Law to ensure fairness, foster balanced development between traditional press outlets and emerging media forms, and address newly arising issues. The revised Press Law should also encompass global concerns, such as intellectual property rights, reader data protection, and user experience rights.

To sum up, the development of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and the explosion of social media sites have raised many ethical and legal issues, as

current laws struggle to keep up with the rapid changes in mass media and digital transformation. However, research on legal issues in online media receives less attention compared to other areas. Most studies describe the current situation and identify arising issues without providing specific strategic solutions to amend legal documents and make them more suitable for the current context.

4 Conclusions

Over the past decades, Vietnam's digital media and communication sectors have undergone significant transformations. Scholarly investigations in this domain have examined various aspects of digitalization, demonstrating both the appeal and substantial impact of new technologies on media and communication industries.

Through the lens of technological innovation, researchers have concentrated on alterations in content format and newsroom management across different levels, from national newsrooms to specific local contexts. These studies have notably advocated for the integration of new technologies in content production and public engagement. Within the discourse on the roles of digital media, research indicates that despite the evolution in content formats, journalism's core responsibilities remain to ensure political stability, report on diverse facets of the nation's socio-economic development, and combat misinformation. Furthermore, studies also explore the impact of social networks in fostering public participation, encouraging public discourse, and amplifying citizen voices on significant societal issues.

Regarding media practitioners, research highlights ethical considerations faced by journalists amid digital transformation. The internet environment has introduced complex issues in journalism and mass communication, such as the exploitation of personal suffering, lack of verification, insensitivity, inhumane treatment of vulnerable groups (including children and adolescents), and discrepancies between journalists' actions and statements.

In examining the evolving audience in the digital age, researchers have identified a more active public. Concepts like intelligent public, high-tech public, and digital citizens, though originating from distinct research traditions, converge on the notion that changes in the public are intricately linked to advancements in information technology.

From the view points of social impacts, researchers reveal the Internet and social media's dual impact on different social classes' identities and behaviors in Vietnam. On the bright side, social media encourages activism and self-expression while promoting new behaviors and upholding established values. On the other hand, there are worries about the invasions of privacy and the detrimental impacts that excessive internet use has on one's mental health.

In the business realm, research emphasizes the critical role of social media and digital platforms in transforming business practices and consumer behaviors. There is a clear trend of businesses increasingly relying on digital platforms to connect with consumers and drive growth across industries.

Last but not least, the digital transformation has raised many ethical and legal issues, as current laws struggle to keep up with the rapid changes in mass media and digital transformation. Research on legal issues in online media receives less attention compared to other areas. Most studies describe the current situation and identify arising issues without providing specific strategic solutions.

Besides the aforementioned points, our review found a general characteristic of media research in Vietnam: studies conducted and published locally have predominantly focused on practical issues. As a result of this overemphasis on practical aspects, these studies lack theoretical contributions. Studies and dissertations from 2015 and earlier often simplified the theoretical frameworks or mingled academic theories with the leading party's political orientations in technology and media development. In recent years, there has been a notable shift due to the influence of academics trained abroad. These scholars have introduced a variety of social sciences theories into local universities, enriching the academic landscape with more theoretical discussions and contributions. The shift towards incorporating robust theoretical frameworks is enhancing the academic discourse in the country.

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