

Media ethics in the digital age in Vietnam

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Abstract: The author of this article researched how media ethics problems are used in Vietnamese journalism. The paper considers the reasons leading to the moral weakness of journalists, thereby offering solutions to improve their morality and qualifications. The result of the research plays an essential role not only in journalism theory generally but also for current Vietnamese journalists in particular.

Keywords: social media, media ethics, vietnamese journalism, professional ethics

1. Introduction

The more socioeconomic life is developed, the more important journalism's role and position are. It could be said that the press is considered a special activity that has sociopolitical features, namely, that each journal work has a certain impact on readers and even on the management apparatus of that society. Only by adhering to the provisions of the law and upholding professional ethics will journalism be able to perform the necessary functions that form the foundation of humanistic journalism.

2. Findings

The fourth industrial revolution is affecting every aspect of society, which results in many changes in the journal field. The first change is in the way information is collected and produced. Currently, journalists could perform different skills at the same time, such as photographing, handling image processing photos, videoing, or editing, instead of taking responsibility for one task as in traditional journal technology. Simultaneously, with only a smartphone and an internet connection, one person could be responsible for all steps, from ideal formation to publishing a completed journal work. The transformation in journalism skills could be considered the self-development of journalism and meeting the public's requirements.

The second change is the way of conveying news: with its preeminent features, the Internet has created an information explosion that breaks the limits of space and time compared to other traditional mass media. With one click, the information is immediately spread out to millions of people around the world.

The third change is how the public accesses the information. People passively obtain information through traditional forms of journalism, including television, written media, and spoken media. They have to wait for the broadcast time or the publication date. However, in the digital era, people could actively choose the time, the channel, and the type of information they received. If they miss any interesting news or events, they can easily find and rewatch them on the internet.

The fourth change is the birth of many types of journalism, such as cross-platform journalism, mobile journalism, social media journalism, data journalism, graphic journalism, etc. These types of integrated multimedia bring new experiences to the users and could accomplish multi-functions at the same time watching TV, listening to music, reading the newspaper, playing video games, etc.

The fifth change is the appearance and strong development of social media. According to We Are the Social's research, as of 2021, Vietnam had 72 million active social media accounts, accounting for 73.7% of the total population. Youtube, Facebook, and Zalo currently have the most users, accounting for 92%, 91.7%, and 76.5 percent of internet users in Vietnam, respectively. The general public tends to find and read the information on social media platforms instead of traditional media channels.

All of those changes could be viewed as both opportunities and difficulties for modern journalism, particularly in terms of professional ethics.

Many press agencies are following the trends to increase views and interactions; they don't care about the quality of the information. It is clear that commercialized news brings less value to the community and has no social criticism.

These press agencies have not performed well in their ideological and cultural functions, have participated in social supervision, and have shown signs of being far from the principles and purposes of their operations, both from the leadership of the party and the management of the state. It is because the noble goal of the Vietnamese revolutionary press is to serve the people on the road to building a socialist country (Phan Van Kien, 2012).

Some journalists report inaccurate and unverified news. This is a fairly common phenomenon in journalism in Vietnam today. With the preeminent features of the internet, we do not need to go to the scene but

can still find information related to the incident that happened. However, reporters and journalists cannot use that information to create journalism without first verifying its accuracy. Many people even imagine the characters and interviews in their journalistic work.

Many people exploit the journalist's right to profit. Recently, several reporters have been arrested for blackmailing businesses. These people try to find mistakes in the production and business of the companies and ask these companies to pay a large amount of money in exchange for hiding the mistake. At the same time, journalists are also easily bribed to create "dirty media" that use press power to glorify or undercut a brand. Currently, the press plays a huge role in creating public opinion (Duong Xuan Son, 2011) and many large economic groups take advantage of the power of the press to carry out propaganda campaigns. In other words, they spread the news to promote public attitudes, sentiments, and views in favor of a movement or corporation (R.A. Nelson, 1996).

It is a fact that news agencies are so focused on reporting negative news that they forget about positive information. It is not difficult for us to find articles about social evils (corruption, murder, suicide, adultery, etc.) in the mass media. that were inadvertently published, such as the country's achievements in the fields of technology, economy, and outstanding people. Moreover, according to their expertise, it is this invisible way of reporting that will make readers have the habit of looking for negative information. Mass media has a significant impact on social life and people's perceptions of reality in the age of globalization (Iwona Anna Ndiaye, Bara Ndiaye, 2014).

The preparation, storage, receiving, accessing, giving, and dissemination of information in the mass media all raise ethical questions known as "media ethics" (Adam Drozdek, 2015). Perhaps some journalists broke the standards of conduct, used their positions for personal gain, and hurt society. The idea that journalists should refrain from including too many harsh, personal, and subjective comments in their work is sound, but the reality shows that many journalists actively strive to sway public opinion through one-sided reporting.

The journalist's moral degradation is caused by many different reasons, including subjective and objective causes. First of all, it is necessary to mention that the provisions of the law are loose and the severity of punishment is low. The amendment of the law has not kept pace with the rapid development of the press, especially on the Internet. That makes it difficult for the state to manage non-traditional press activities.

Pressure on the news agency's information creation is also brought on by the growing public demand for information. The public does not have the time or patience to wait for news like before; they want to have their needs met quickly and on time. The fast speed of news production leads to a lack of tight control over information, creating many inadequacies.

Furthermore, the current media market must be mentioned: press agencies' revenue is calculated by followers, views, and interactions on platforms. Reporters and journalists work in a highly competitive environment under sales pressure, so they sometimes overlook the noble duty of the profession, willing to do the wrong thing to attract readers.

Another reason to mention the weakness in the management of the press agencies. In the journalism industry, the handling of infractions is still lax and insufficiently deterrent. In addition, some organizations are not interested in improving the professional qualifications and legal knowledge of reporters and journalists. Massive recruitment leads to a poor quality of reporters who do not meet the requirements of ethics and professional knowledge.

The last reason is due to the people working in the field of journalism. In Vietnam, people without a degree in journalism can also work in this field. Reporters who lack professional knowledge, lack political courage and lack legal understanding easily violate professional ethics. Because in the era of media digitalization and convergence, there are more and more "non-professional ideological" journalists, who believe that anyone can become a journalist (Slavko Splichal, 2015)

3. Conclusion

Communication ethics is also a research area that attracts great attention from journalists, public relations specialists, and scientists worldwide (Katerina Tsetsura, Chiara Valentini, 2016). Solving the issue of journalistic ethics requires the efforts of state management agencies, press agencies, and journalists themselves.

Firstly, although the necessity of training to improve qualifications is clearly stated in the press law, every journalist also needs to improve himself to improve his understanding of the ethics and provisions of the law.

Secondly, in the current social context, the press is considered the fourth power that exists in parallel with other branches of the state, namely legislative, executive, and judicial. That proves the indispensable position of the press in social and political life.

Therefore, Vietnamese legislators as well as the government need to have measures to manage and sanction the press to both ensure the information needs of the people and keep up with the development of the

press. In addition to regulations related to traditional print, radio, and television newspapers, there should be more regulations and related sanctions for electronic newspapers. Sanctions should also be stronger. Maybe even a criminal case

Third, agencies must improve journalists' professional, and ethical qualifications by focusing on staff quality and strict management, which will not only improve the agency's image but also create a more favorable view of journalism.

Fourthly, to raise the level of professional political awareness, each journalist must see himself as a frontline soldier of thought, always training and studying. Journalists need to understand the huge role journalism plays. When creating journalistic works, journalists need to know that they not only meet the information needs of the public but also contribute to maintaining the stability of society.

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